DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Mini-Publics and the Maxi-Public: Investigating the Perceived Legitimacy of Citizens' Assemblies in a Deeply Divided Place

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Award date:
2019

Awarding institution:
Queen's University Belfast

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Investigating the Perceived Legitimacy of Citizens' Assemblies in a Deeply Divided Place

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Politics

The Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice

School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy & Politics

May 2019

ABSTRACT

Across the world, democratic deficits arise from a growing gap between citizens' expectations and the way they perceive political systems to operate in practice. Deliberative theory offers a potential solution by advocating the direct involvement of ordinary citizens in structured decision-making. This approach has been increasingly applied to real-world decision-making through mini-public initiatives. This thesis investigates the largely neglected relationship between citizens' assemblies, as one established form of mini-public, and their perceived legitimacy from the perspective of the maxi-public. Compared to other modes of decision-making, to what extent do people regard citizens' assemblies as legitimate? And are there design features of citizens' assemblies that strengthen or weaken perceptions of their legitimacy?

These questions are applied to the deeply divided case of Northern Ireland, where it can be particularly challenging to design democratic institutions that command popular legitimacy. Cross-sectional survey data reveal largely favourable attitudes towards citizens' assemblies, especially compared to some more familiar modes of decision-making. The results of a series of complementary online experiments find that specific design features of citizens' assemblies have no direct effect on perceived legitimacy. However, there is some variation at the individual-level, suggesting that the design features of a citizens' assembly should reflect its purpose and the broader context. Overall, the findings suggest that the establishment of citizens' assemblies alongside existing institutions can make a positive contribution to the democratic performance of a political system, even in a deeply divided place.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It gives me immense pleasure to reflect on the many individuals who have motivated and enabled me to produce this work. I first had the opportunity to study politics as an A-Level student at Wallace High School, when I was introduced to the idea that there is no single model of democracy that exists, but rather that it can take different forms – each with their strengths and weaknesses. Never did it occur to me that it I would still be studying the subject over a decade later or, indeed, that I would have the opportunity to conduct first-hand research on improving the way democracy works at a time when it seems to be under so much strain. It was thanks to the passion and encouragement of my teachers – Julie Dumigan, Neil Armstrong and Michael Lowry – that I discovered my own passion for the study of politics.

Many years later, I have been blessed as a PhD student to encounter a similarly supportive environment. First and foremost, I am truly indebted to my supervisor, Professor John Garry, whose constant patience, wisdom and thoughtfulness know no bounds. His thorough feedback has undoubtedly improved this thesis, and his mentorship has been invaluable. I can only aspire to be as dedicated a political scientist and as generous a human being. I also owe a great deal of thanks to my second supervisor, Professor Rhiannon Turner. Her expertise in social psychology has helped me to navigate some of the interdisciplinary elements of this research, particularly around experimental design and the literature on inter-group relations. Others at Queen's offered constructive feedback at various stages of the project: John Coakley, Chris Raymond, Lee McGowan, Heather Johnson, Andrew Thomson and Muiris MacCarthaigh. I thank each of them. Any errors are, of course, my own.

During the course of my research, I am grateful to everyone who provided me with feedback at seminars and conferences. Of particular value was the time I spent as a visiting researcher at the Centre for Deliberative Democracy and Global Governance at the University of Canberra. Conversations with Simon Niemeyer, Nicole Curato, John Dryzek, Selen Ercan, Jonathan Pickering and Ian O'Flynn (who was also visiting at the time) offered a combination of motivational encouragement and extremely helpful feedback. I also want to thank Mark Warren for taking the time to offer some very useful thoughts at an early stage of the project.

The journey would not have been half as enjoyable had I not been working alongside so many amazing colleagues at Queen's – particularly Jamie Day, Matt O'Neill, Alina Utrata, Steve McGookin, Méabh MacMahon Clare Rice, Erin Tumulty, Kevin McNicholl, Amalia Campos Delgado, Karolina Urbańska and Thia Sagherian-Dickey – as evidenced by countless conversations, usually involving coffee (but occasionally something stronger), and the lasting friendships that have developed. On that note, I first got to know Alastair McCollum and Mark Dobbin all the way back in our A-Level politics class together at Wallace. They put up with me then, and they've continued to put up with me throughout the PhD, including my somewhat repetitive response of, "It's getting there…" to their frequent question of, "So, how's the thesis coming along?"

Turning to the thesis itself, I want to thank each of the 4,500 people who took the time to participate in this research. Without them, it would not have been possible. I extend particular thanks to the survey companies involved: Ipsos-MORI, Opinium and LucidTalk. They collected the data used in this thesis and were each a pleasure to work with. In addition, this research would not have been possible without funding provided by the Department for the Economy of Northern Ireland,

and from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) for two projects: 'Randomly Selected 'Politicians': Transforming Democracy in the Post-Conflict Context' (ES/M000257/1) and 'Power-Sharing and Voting: Conflict, Accountability and Electoral Behaviour at the 2015 Northern Ireland Assembly Election' (ES/L005808/1). The Ethics Committee of the School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics at Queen's University Belfast granted approval for each of the empirical studies funded by these projects.

I was conscious of the fact that I have been funded by a department of the Northern Ireland Executive which collapsed halfway through my research. This gave me an added sense of responsibility, even a sense of urgency, to channel my research into a constructive contribution to the ongoing political stalemate. I sincerely hope this thesis can make such a contribution, no matter how small. While the political climate has often been rather depressing in Northern Ireland over the last three years, it was a pleasure to observe the first Citizens' Assembly for Northern Ireland becoming a reality in late 2018. Serving on the Advisory Group of this body enabled me to share the preliminary findings of my research and contribute to the development of the initiative. I thank the project organisers at Involve and my colleagues on the Advisory Group for this opportunity, as well as my colleagues at *Northern Slant* for giving me the platform to write about it.

Finally, above all, I owe my greatest debt of gratitude to my parents – for their love and support (as well as their proofreading skills). In this respect, I could simply have copied and pasted the acknowledgements from my undergraduate dissertation or my MA thesis – not for ease, but because it continues to be so true. Even when I have doubted my abilities, they have always believed in me. This thesis is for them.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BCCA	British Columbia Citizens' Assembly
CAPI	Computer-Assisted Personal Interviews
DQI	Discourse Quality Index
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
ESS	European Social Survey
EU	European Union
IRA	Irish Republican Army
LM	Lunar Module
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
MP	Member of Parliament
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NI	Northern Ireland
NILTS	Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey
NIO	Northern Ireland Office
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
PR	Proportional Representation
PR-STV	Proportional Representation—Single Transferable Vote
RHI	Renewable Heat Incentive
SDLP	Social Democratic and Labour Party
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US	United States
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

> *Apollo 13*: Houston, Houston, Apollo 13. Over.
>
> *Mission Control*: Good morning, 13. […] Spacecraft is in real good shape as far as we're concerned, Jim. We're bored to tears down here.
>
> Radio communication between Apollo 13 Commander Jim Lovell and Mission Control, 12 April 1970 (NASA, 1970: 120)

When Francis Fukuyama ruminated the 'end of history' in 1989, he sparked an enduring debate in political science. Many scholars, often implicitly, came to share the basic contention that liberal democracy had indeed emerged "as the final form of human government" (Fukuyama, 1989: 4). Though plenty of critics feared its prematurity, the proposition proved attractive not just for its comforting optimism against the backdrop of an uncertain post-Cold War order, but also for its apparent predictive validity. From the communist states of Central and Eastern Europe to the dictatorships of Latin America, regime transitions around the world largely affirmed the spread and consolidation of democracy. For much of the two decades that followed the end of the Cold War, the global march towards 'more democracy' appeared relatively sure-footed and unidirectional.

More recent observations suggest that the journey is, in fact, much more precarious, with mounting evidence of backsliding and exertion. It is not just that

newly democratised systems have struggled to consolidate; established democracies are also facing a crisis of legitimacy, marked by falling popular support for representative institutions (Foa and Mounk, 2016; Fishkin and Mansbridge, 2017). Diamond (2015: 144) argues that a "protracted democratic recession" has been underway since 2006, and most of the indicators have less to do with citizens abandoning an underlying commitment to basic democratic principles and, rather, much more to do with the failure of existing institutions and processes to meet citizens' democratic expectations. This, in turn, may leave increasingly critical citizens willing to consider non-democratic forms of government (Norris, 1999; 2011).

Fukuyama's argument may yet be proven right, but if liberal democracy is to survive, let alone triumph over its rivals, we need to review some of the basic elements of modern democracy that are often taken for granted. For instance, are elections the only legitimate way of selecting decision-makers? Should decision-making rest on the agendas of political parties? And are existing institutions and procedures adequately designed to promote constructive problem-solving and avoid potentially toxic gridlock? If, after critical reflection, any of these answers turns out to be 'no', we need to consider radical reforms to the way democratic political systems operate if they are to earn their unassailable place in history.

1.1 Contextualising the Problem

This thesis confronts the basic problem of a perceived democratic deficit, defined as the failure of a political system to meet citizens' expectations for democratic decision-making. Drawing on Fishkin (1991; 2009), these expectations are rooted in

the ability of a political system to deliver the democratic principles of political equality, deliberation, and non-tyranny. When the process of selecting decision-makers undermines the promotion of political equality, when decision-making lacks meaningful deliberation, or when decisions are taken with tyrannical consequences for certain individuals, either in isolation or in combination, decision-making will lack the level of legitimacy required to sustain a healthy, functioning democracy. The present research builds on previous literature in political psychology that finds citizens' evaluations of democratic legitimacy to be a function of the *procedural* performance of a political system, distinct from the substantive outcomes produced by the system (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 1995; 2002). Accordingly, it assumes that reforms to the process of making democratic decisions can enhance (or diminish) the extent to which citizens perceive the system to be legitimate.

In deeply divided places, especially those emerging from violent conflict, the very existence of democratic governance is often precarious. In these polities, Morrow (2005: 45) emphasises the fundamental "struggle to find and implement democratic institutions that can manage conflict in ways that can be accepted as legitimate." Compared to democracies that are less divided and more established, the inherent difficulty in designing and maintaining a democratic political system in a deeply divided polity is more obvious; the survival of democratic institutions and processes is rarely taken for granted. Consequently, such contexts are particularly relevant for the study of democratic deficits – and, more urgently, for potential remedies. For these reasons, this thesis adopts post-conflict Northern Ireland as a pertinent case study. Having emerged from three decades of ethno-national conflict, Northern Ireland's political experience has been decidedly mixed during the two

decades that followed: positive, in the sense that peace has firmly taken hold, and yet citizens have been left largely disappointed by their new institutions of government.

The 1998 peace settlement, the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, has been heralded internationally as a success story for its application of consociational theory to the management of ethno-national conflict (McGarry and O'Leary, 2009; McCulloch, 2014). In practice, however, the democratic performance of the political system it created leaves much to be desired. By entrenching the ethno-national ideological dimension within the system, centrist views are under-represented among decision-makers. The process of making decisions tends to be intensely partisan, marked by opaque bargaining over fixed interests. These features, coupled with a low veto threshold, combine to make gridlock a regular occurrence, preventing important policy decisions from being taken and undermining citizens' perceptions of the legitimacy of the process.

This underlying democratic deficit leaves the system poorly equipped to confront the moments of acute political crisis that are typical in deeply divided places. If citizens' evaluations of a political system are so poor, there is a danger that the system will not be able to withstand such a crisis. In any deeply divided society with a relatively short experience of peace, a power vacuum has the potential to be filled by a return to violence (Belloni, 2008). Given that Northern Ireland is often treated as an exemplar of consociational democratic design, exploring effective ways of helping to avoid such an outcome will offer important insights with a high degree of generalisability to other consociational polities. Beyond these, given the emerging divisions in many traditionally stable democracies, there is particular contemporary value in studying democratic performance in a place with a history of managing (and mismanaging) deep divisions.

1.2 Addressing the Problem

A potential answer to democratic deficits could lie in empowering the *dēmos* themselves. In ancient Athens and other city-states, the earliest forms of democracy saw ordinary citizens directly engaged in political decision-making (Dahl, 1989). As the nation-state replaced the city-state as the dominant mode of political organisation, citizens came to play a much less direct role in public affairs, transforming our understanding of democratic governance. Over the last number of decades, however, a deliberative turn in democratic theory has been associated with a renewed emphasis on the formal involvement of ordinary citizens in politics: "Increasingly, democratic legitimacy [has come] to be seen in terms of the ability or opportunity to participate in effective deliberation on the part of those subject to collective decisions" (Dryzek, 2000: 1).

Similarly, deliberative theory has increasingly been put into institutional practice, with the emergence of a healthy supply of democratic innovations designed to strengthen the legitimacy of decision-making (Smith, 2009). These include mini-publics, of which citizens' assemblies constitute "the most extensive modern form of collective decision-making by common folk" (Fournier et al. 2011: 10). Members of these bodies, usually around one hundred or more in number, are randomly selected from the wider population. They learn about a given issue, deliberate about the best way forward, and take a decision. The Canadian province of British Columbia pioneered the use of citizens' assemblies in 2004, when its government commissioned one on the issue of electoral reform (Warren and Pearse, 2008). Citizens' assemblies have subsequently been held in Ontario, the Netherlands, Ireland, Poland, and the United Kingdom. A growing international precedent is being set whereby ordinary citizens are demonstrating both their competence and

appetite to be involved in political decision-making alongside existing representative institutions and processes.

Turning to the case of Northern Ireland and its rather extreme democratic deficit, there is a precedent for formally embedding civil society in the political process. Along with an elected Assembly and Executive, the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement established a Civic Forum. The advisory body comprised sixty members appointed by the First and deputy First Minister to represent different sectors of civil society, including trade unionism, business, education, the voluntary and community sectors, and churches. However, it quickly earned a reputation as a "talking shop" on a vague set of issues, lacking a clear sense of purpose and connection to the wider public as a whole (Donnelly, 2015: 35). Partly because of its corporatist membership linked to arbitrarily defined groups, partly because of its rather vague decision-making remit, and partly because of a perception that its output was inconsequential, there was insufficient enthusiasm to preserve the Civic Forum alongside Northern Ireland's elected institutions; it lasted only two years (McCaffrey, 2013). Nonetheless, its failure offers a valuable lesson: democratic institutions must be established with a carefully defined (and valued) role from the outset, and the key elements of their practical design must effectively facilitate this objective.

With an apparently growing need for citizen-based democratic innovations to help compensate for the contemporary weaknesses of elected institutions, there is a corresponding need to empirically interrogate the likely effectiveness of such institutional experiments. While the literature on deliberative democracy has expanded considerably in recent years to encompass questions of both normative *and* empirical inquiry, empirical research has overwhelmingly focused on the effect of mini-public deliberation on the relatively small number of people participating. The

findings largely confirm theoretical expectations that citizens value the experience of taking part (Delli Carpini *et al.* 2004; Niemeyer, 2011; Knobloch and Gastil, 2015).

What is less clear is the nature of the psychological relationship between mini-publics and the broader population – what may be termed the maxi-public. Beyond consistent evidence of the positive *internal* dynamics within citizens' assemblies and other mini-publics, what is the *external* effect of such institutions on the attitudes of the citizens who are *not* involved? A small number of empirical studies have explored maxi-public attitudes towards deliberative mini-publics. Gastil *et al.* (2016) find that people largely value the contribution of citizen panels in a number of American states, while Jäske (2018) finds that local-level participatory innovations in Finland, ranging from citizen juries to participatory budgeting, have a positive influence on the perceived legitimacy of decision-making. More generally, Neblo *et al.* (2010) find that there is popular demand for deliberative initiatives, particularly from people who are less likely to participate in conventional politics.

This thesis builds on these studies of public opinion by focusing specifically on the relationship between citizens' assemblies and perceived legitimacy, and the broader implications of this relationship for democratic performance. Can citizens' assemblies meet people's general expectations for the delivery of the democratic principles of political equality, deliberation and non-tyranny? And, importantly, how do people's evaluations of these democratic innovations compare to their evaluations of more conventional modes of decision-making? In other words, if democratic deficits stem from the failure of political systems to meet citizens' expectations, can the institutionalisation of citizens' assemblies help to target some of these symptoms? These questions capture the overarching motivation behind the present research.

1.3 Overview of the Thesis

The goal of this thesis is to evaluate the potential for deliberative mini-publics, in the form of citizens' assemblies, to strengthen the democratic performance of a political system from the perspective of the maxi-public. It takes a positivist approach, seeking not to argue that citizens' assemblies have an inherently positive effect on the legitimacy of a political system, but rather to first test whether or not they are perceived to make a positive contribution to democratic performance by citizens themselves. In scientific research, "the goal is inference" (King *et al.* 1994: 7). The question for this thesis, therefore, becomes one of how to construct a research design that can generate the strongest possible inferences. This is important because the audience of this research is not limited to the field of political science; it is hoped that its theoretical and empirical insights will help policy-makers make informed decisions on the most effective use of citizens' assemblies in democratic practice. Drawing on both observational and experimental data, collected face-to-face and online between 2015 and 2018, this thesis conducts a systematic analysis of the likely effect of mini-public decision-making on the attitudes of the maxi-public in a place with a deep-rooted democratic deficit, Northern Ireland.

Chapter Two begins by setting out a theoretical framework in which democratic deficits may be diagnosed in the first place, and subsequently addressed. It conceptualises democratic decision-making as a basic system: citizens' political preferences provide inputs that pass through established decision-making processes before being transformed into policy outputs. Citizens' collective feedback on the system's performance offers a crucial measure of legitimacy: negative evaluations signal that the system is falling short of citizens' expectations for the delivery of political equality, deliberation and non-tyranny. When this is the case, it is necessary

for the system to be supplemented with a control mechanism to close the deficit between expected and actual democratic performance. Turning to the literature on deliberative democracy, the second half of this chapter argues that mini-publics, institutionalised as citizens' assemblies, can help to serve this role by strengthening the perceived legitimacy of decision-making. In other words, it is argued that citizens' assemblies can help to control democratic deficits.

Chapter Three applies this theoretical framework to the deeply divided case of post-conflict Northern Ireland. Drawing on preliminary empirical evidence, it establishes the nature and magnitude of the problem facing Northern Ireland's consociational political system. Chapter Four proceeds to investigate the extent to which citizens' assemblies can offer a viable solution. Framed against the backdrop of a political crisis, it analyses cross-sectional survey data to weigh up basic attitudes towards citizens' assemblies compared to other, more conventional, modes of decision-making. Sixty-five percent of respondents think that it would be a good or very good idea for citizens' assemblies to play a formal role in decision-making. The analysis shows that citizens' assemblies are perceived by the maxi-public to be equally or more legitimate than more familiar alternatives and, crucially, that positive evaluations are particularly high among individuals hypothesised to be poorly served by the existing political system. A follow-up survey experiment confirms that these initial procedural evaluations are robust: a clear majority of respondents say they would accept a decision taken by a citizens' assembly, even when the decision runs contrary to their own instrumental preferences. Levels of acceptance are comparable to those for most other modes of decision-making, suggesting that decision-making by citizens' assemblies can attract the consent of

those who do not get the decisions they want. This is a fundamental indicator of democratic legitimacy.

In a series of complementary online experiments, the next three empirical chapters examine the different ways of designing citizens' assemblies that could strengthen or weaken perceptions of their legitimacy, with particular attention to the context of a deeply divided place. Are there different ways of designing citizens' assemblies that can maximise their perceived legitimacy across different levels of ethno-national ideology and across different groups?

Chapter Five addresses the selection of mini-public members at the input stage of decision-making. Does the perceived legitimacy of citizens' assemblies depend on the profile of their members and how they are chosen? Chapter Six moves on to the nature of decision-making at the throughput stage of the process. Does deliberation strengthen the perceived legitimacy of mini-public decision-making? Chapter Seven considers the decision power of citizens' assemblies. Does a citizens' assembly's embedded relationship with other decision-making processes, such as referendums or votes in the legislative Assembly, make it regarded as a more or less legitimate body? In the studies presented in these three chapters, each hypothetical model of citizens' assembly was consistently viewed as more legitimate than the real-world Northern Ireland Assembly, indicating considerable scope for such bodies to help reduce a perceived democratic deficit, at least in the case of Northern Ireland. The findings also offer a large degree of flexibility concerning the institutional design of citizens' assemblies.

Chapter Eight discusses the implications of this research for the application of deliberative mini-publics to deeply divided settings, both in the specific context of Northern Ireland and in the wider context of constitutional design in other polities

with consociational systems of government. More generally, this chapter considers the methodological contribution of this thesis to the field of political science, and the theoretical contribution it makes to the literature on deliberation and democratic innovations.

The reader will notice that each chapter begins by paying homage to the failed Apollo 13 lunar mission, quoting some of the air-to-ground radio exchanges between the crew and Mission Control. These references may seem curious; the parallels between space exploration and democratic governance are perhaps not instantly obvious. And yet both endeavours represent daringly bold efforts of human ingenuity, venturing into the unknown of space and time. Neither are they accidental, spontaneous outcomes. On the contrary, they result from conscious efforts to achieve goals once thought unthinkable: to land on the moon, or to let the *dēmos* govern themselves.

Having become normalised features of everyday life, it is easy to take the continued pursuit of such goals for granted. Just after Apollo 13 blasted off from Cape Kennedy on 11 April 1970, its crew filmed a live broadcast for viewers back on earth. None of the major US networks carried it, considering it to be insufficiently interesting or newsworthy, especially in light of the successful moon landing of the previous year. Their calculation changed when the mission descended into crisis: an exploded oxygen tank left the Apollo 13 spacecraft unable to reach the moon, with little certainty that it could even make it back to earth. It did, owing much to the unwavering determination of the crew and Mission Control to 'work the problem' and respond effectively. There was nothing routine about the mission to begin with, but it took a crisis to shake off any sense of complacency and, in turn, to provide an opportunity to learn lessons and explore new possibilities.

The challenges threatening the sustainability of democratic political systems may not carry the same weight of impending peril. Unlike missions to space, the journey has neither a fixed duration nor a clear destination. As such, compounded by the problem of citizens' increasingly high expectations, the mission of maintaining democratic governance lacks a tangible measure of success. Likewise, its relative abstraction makes it harder to identify when things go wrong, and harder still to appreciate the urgent need for an intervention when they do. It is against an increasingly stark backdrop of democracy in crisis that this thesis joins a growing body of scholarship attempting to work the problem.

Chapter Two

DIAGNOSING & CONTROLLING DEMOCRATIC DEFICITS

A FRAMEWORK

Apollo 13: I believe we've had a problem here.

Mission Control: This is Houston. Say again, please.

Apollo 13: Houston, we've had a problem.

Radio communication between Commander Jim Lovell and Mission Control, 13 April 1970 (NASA, 1970: 160)

The essence of politics lies in the making of decisions. The essence of a *democratic* political system lies in the making of decisions that can be accepted as legitimate by its citizens. By extension, when it comes to assessing the democratic health of a political system, the attitudes of citizens themselves serve as a vital indicator of any underlying problems (Easton, 1965: 96). People formulate subjective judgements about the decision-making process, weighing up the extent to which arrangements are "appropriate, proper and just" (Tyler, 2006: 376). On the one hand, citizens may perceive a political system to be fundamentally legitimate because they believe in the values underpinning it; they identify with its normative foundation. This is an affective relationship, marked by diffuse support. On the other hand, citizens may

perceive a political system to be legitimate because they hold a broadly positive evaluation of the way in which its decision-making process performs on a day-to-day basis. This is an evaluative relationship, marked by a form of system support that is more specific in nature (Almond and Verba, 1963; Easton, 1965). When the process of political decision-making routinely fails to meet citizens' expectations, the system has a problem: a democratic deficit.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the nature of this kind of problem, but also to move beyond it by setting out a targeted solution: the application of deliberative democracy. The argument develops in two main stages. It begins by presenting a theoretical framework for diagnosing a democratic deficit, holding that citizens' evaluative perceptions of a system's legitimacy are a function of the way in which the system converts inputs into outputs. This framework follows Easton's (1965) conceptualisation of political decision-making as a system, before drawing on Fishkin (1991) for a set of core democratic principles that citizens could reasonably expect to observe from it: political equality, deliberation and non-tyranny. The extent to which decision-making promotes these principles should explain the extent to which citizens perceive the system to be legitimate.

Second, this chapter observes that when any system suffers from sub-optimal performance, a supplementary control mechanism is often necessary to correct it. Applied to political systems experiencing a democratic deficit, it is argued that mini-publics could help to fulfil this remedial role. By promoting Fishkin's key principles, these democratic innovations have the potential to strengthen people's perceptions of the legitimacy of decision-making. Specifically, the chapter considers how one type of mini-public, citizens' assemblies, could supplement the existing institutions of a political system to help to meaningfully control the system's perceived deficiencies.

2.1 Perceived Legitimacy in a Political System

As a departure point, let us consider the general process of political decision-making as a basic system. Reduced to its simplest form, a system is defined by a set of elements that, in combination, produce a result. A desired behaviour or demand, *v*, is converted into an observed behaviour or output, *y* (Leigh, 2012).[1] Applied to the political domain, citizens' demands supply the system with its core inputs; these are fed into an established set of procedures, and public policy decisions are the outputs (Easton, 1965).[2] A *democratic* political system, however, can never be strictly linear: it must possess the dynamic capacity to interact with its environment (i.e. citizens) over time. If a necessary function of such a system is to generate decisions worthy of being considered legitimate, it follows that citizens' observations of the system, and how it reaches those decisions, must ultimately form part of our understanding of the system itself. Figure 2.1 depicts this interactive element as a feedback loop.[3]

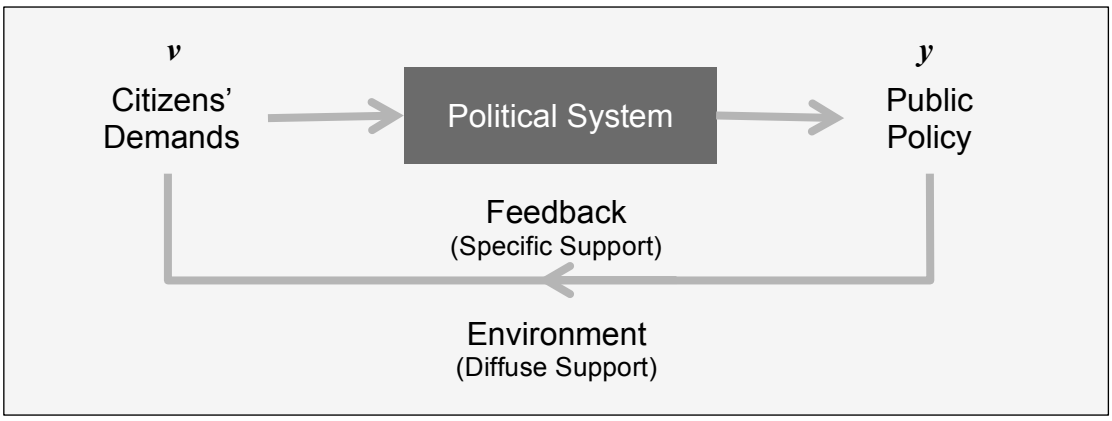

Figure 2.1: *A basic democratic political system (adapted from Easton, 1965: 32)*

[1] The idea of a 'system' has its etymological roots in the Greek compound *sýstēma*, derived from *syn* (to combine) and *histanai* (to cause to stand). See Harper (2017) for more detail.
[2] Easton's (1965) systems approach has been widely adopted in political science. See, for example, Hix and Høyland (2011), Norris (1999; 2011), and Schmidt (2013). However, it was Plato who first introduced cybernetics to political philosophy (Piotrowski, 2012).
[3] As Easton (1965: 23) acknowledges, "No one way of conceptualising any major area of human behaviour will do full justice to all its variety and complexity." The conceptual approach adopted in this thesis is necessarily reductionist to meaningfully address the overall research question.

Easton (1965; 1975) distinguishes between two basic orientations of citizens' observations of the political system.[4] Its environment supplies *diffuse* support: a favourable distribution of norms and values across a given society provides some of the necessary conditions for the system to endure. Diffuse support is not generally sensitive to the quotidian performance of the system but, rather, "consists of a 'reservoir of favourable attitudes'" underpinning it (Easton, 1975: 444). It is characterised by an ideological durability and sense of collective identity that instil "a willingness to maintain and defend the structures or norms of a regime even if they produce unfavourable consequences" (Easton, 1975: 451). In other words, citizens may not always hold favourable attitudes towards the immediate political process or its decisions, but affective attitudes towards the system remain positive itself due to an underlying, socialised perception of its fundamental, long-term legitimacy (Almond and Verba, 1963; Dalton, 1999: 74).

In contrast, the level of *specific* support towards a system is a function of its perceived performance. Oriented towards a much narrower temporal focus, citizens observe the behaviour of the system, compare it against their expectations, and are thus able to make (and update) short-term evaluations. The feedback loop depicted in Figure 2.1 constitutes an empirical measure of legitimacy based on the "satisfaction that members of a system feel they obtain from (its) perceived outputs and performance" (Easton, 1975: 437). High levels of specific support indicate a system in good democratic health; low levels symptomise a short-term democratic deficit, where there is a "gap between aspirations and satisfaction" in the functioning of democracy (Norris, 2011: 5).

[4] This is a simplification of Easton's argument. On top of the broad concepts of diffuse and specific system support, he posits that legitimacy can be directed at different objects – the regime or the authorities – and that it has different sources – ideology, structure and personal qualities (Easton, 1965: 287). In the present chapter the focus is kept deliberately broad: on the overall political system.

This conceptual distinction between diffuse and specific support is important. If legitimacy is venting from a political system, whereby citizens' levels of support are trending towards the negative, we must identify the orientation of their low or declining support in order to successfully diagnose the problem and prescribe an appropriate solution. If, for example, citizens have fundamentally low levels of diffuse support towards their political system, this kind of diffuse-oriented democratic deficit may not be easily bridged in the short-term by electing a new government or designing process-based reforms to the system (Norris, 2011: 238). Similarly, if a particular administration is unpopular and does not satisfy the expectations of the electorate, this kind of performance-oriented democratic deficit may not be of great concern for the fundamental long-term survival of the system. Indeed, it may be addressed by simply electing a new administration.

However, there is a critical qualification to this distinction. While Easton generally treats the concepts of diffuse and specific support as mutually independent, there are conditions in which levels of specific support can influence levels of diffuse support. He notes that in some instances, the "frustration of expectations can so jolt the deeper loyalties of the members of a system that their diffuse support falls into a precipitous decline" (Easton, 1975: 445). This possibility can be understood as the potential for disturbance or stress to affect the behaviour of the system and, consequently, its relationship with its environment.[5] If the performance of a system is suddenly or consistently perceived to fall short of the democratic expectations of a sufficient number of citizens, this negative feedback could elicit a deeper erosion of diffuse support for the system. Without sufficient levels of diffuse support, a political system may be unable to survive (Easton, 1965: 96). Therefore, depending

[5] Disturbance or stress can enter the political system through sudden changes to citizens' demands, or through new environmental input(s), such as a political crisis.

on the context, a system's long-term durability may well depend on the extent to which citizens negatively evaluate its short-term performance.

Beyond the distinction between diffuse and specific support, we must further distinguish between two possible sources of the latter. In Figure 2.1, a citizen may observe the public policies emerging from the system and develop positive or negative assessments based purely on these outputs. This is an *instrumental* measure of support: an individual accepts a decision produced by a political system by virtue of its substance. Lipset (1959) argued, for example, that tangible economic development helped to establish the legitimacy of new political systems, while the process of European integration has historically been justified in terms of its positive effects on citizens' lives (Lindgren and Persson, 2010). For Arneson (2003: 122), a democratic system is legitimate because "its operation over time produces better consequences for people than any feasible alternative model of governance."

This type of outcome-based support for decision-making does not require individuals to be motivated by calculations of self-interest. They may instead be motivated by a desire for outcomes to reflect collective interests, for the allocation of public resources and services to promote distributive justice or distributive fairness (Brockner and Wisenfeld, 1996; Lind and Tyler, 1988; Pratto *et al.* 1999; Appelbaum, 2001; Huddy *et al.* 2001). Still, taken to the extreme, a purely instrumentalist approach to democracy reduces a political system as a means to an end, leaving evaluations largely detached from questions of process design (Raz, 1995; Wall, 2007). If other (non-democratic) means can be shown to reach the same ends, this approach would fail to adequately justify democratic decision-making on its own terms. It is, of course perfectly reasonable to measure the level of popular support for specific types of policy outcomes, and presumably something would be

faulty if a democratic system consistently delivered outcomes to which most citizens objected, but such a narrow, conditional measure of support cannot be taken as a proxy for the *legitimacy* of the system itself.

On the other hand, a citizen may evaluate the system's performance based on the way in which inputs (citizens' demands) are converted into outputs (public policies). This is a *procedural* approach to system support: an individual unconditionally accepts the decision produced by a political system by virtue of the process preceding it, regardless of the substance of the decision itself. From this perspective, the way in which a decision-making process is designed is a necessary determinant of its democratic status, independent of the perceived favourability of its results (Gaus, 1997; Waldron, 1999; Holzhacker, 2007; Christiano, 2008). By emphasising the *means* by which a decision is produced, it is this orientation of system support that captures the concept of legitimacy. Building on Tyler (1990), Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (1995: 15) articulate this proceduralist account:

> In essence, an important element of process is people's perceptions that decisions have been made fairly, and these perceptions of the fairness of the process are separate from perceptions of the actual substantive decision. Even if the policy outcome goes against a person's interest, his or her assessment of the system will be more positive if the process is perceived as procedurally just.

In the aggregate, instrumental and procedural factors may both shape citizens' evaluations of a system's performance, but only the latter can be described as a robust measure of its legitimacy. Given the choice, citizens will inevitably prefer to see public policies with which they agree, particularly on those issues that affect or interest them the most. Frustrated with certain decisions, some individuals may

blame the system itself and evaluate its performance accordingly, ignoring the extent to which the decision-making process met their democratic expectations. In heterogeneous places, however, it is inconceivable that all citizens can consistently expect to observe their preferred political outcomes. People will sometimes, perhaps even often, be disappointed by the results of the democratic process, especially as democratic governments increasingly confront external constraints that limit their realistic scope for action (see Strange, 1996; Genschel, 2004; Scharpf, 2011). As Hibbing and Theiss-Morse note, an instrumentally unfavourable decision will not necessarily go unnoticed, but citizens' (negative) instrumental evaluations of the system's performance should be offset if they still perceive its decision-making procedures to be fundamentally legitimate.[6]

Empirically, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (1995) demonstrate that people do indeed evaluate the processes by which democratic decisions are made, and that these perceptions predict citizens' support for the political system in the United States. With a growing popular recognition of a democratic deficit in the European Union (EU), scholars have increasingly turned their attention to the processes and procedures of decision-making rather than simply policy outcomes (Follesdal and Hix, 2006; Borrás *et al.* 2007; Risse and Kleine, 2007; Schmidt, 2013). Survey data from across all member states of the European Union confirm that citizens' levels of satisfaction with EU democracy are influenced by both outputs and procedural factors (Hobolt, 2012). Moreover, successive studies in social psychology have found that individuals are more likely to accept the decisions of authorities when they believe they have been made fairly (De Cremer and van Knippenberg, 2002;

[6] This idea is related to Fiorina's (1981) argument that voters keep a 'running tally' of positive and negative evaluations of political parties. Similarly, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (1995: 13) argue that "support for the political system should be viewed as a running tally of favourable and unfavourable features people associate with the system. Support for any kind is by definition *more than reactions to any single output or action*" (emphasis added).

Tyler and Huo, 2002; Tyler, 2006; Jackson *et al.* 2012; Mazerolle *et al.* 2012; Bradford, 2014; Urbańska, 2017).

Thus, if we accept the Hibbing and Theiss-Morse contention that citizens do, to some extent, care about the way in which decisions are made, we must now consider the sequential elements of the process that may shape evaluations of the system's legitimacy. Drawing on Figure 2.1, there are three essential stages of a democratic system through which inputs are converted into outputs. First, citizens' initial demands must be channelled into the system by some form of selection process. Who are the individuals who will decide what public policy should be? Do citizens perceive this selection process to be legitimate? Second, decisions on public policy must be made before they are taken. In other words, decision-making involves the consideration of different possible courses of action before one is pursued. Do citizens perceive this part of the process to be legitimate? Finally, a decision must be taken by a formal procedure for it to emerge as an output of the system. What is the binding mechanism through which a decision can be formally recognised as such? Do citizens perceive this decision-taking mechanism to be legitimate? To be able to apply these questions to an empirical case, we need to specify the basic standards citizens can reasonably expect from each of these stages of democratic decision-making.

2.2 Democratic Expectations

In the absence of a single democratic theory, there is of course no single standard from which to evaluate a system's procedural performance, the extent to which it is perceived to be legitimate. For Fishkin (1991), however, it is possible to identify

core principles that are to be expected from any democratic system. To various degrees of success, "a fully defensible version of democracy must simultaneously fulfil three conditions: it must achieve *political equality*, its decisions must embody *deliberation*, and it must *avoid tyranny of the majority*" (Fishkin, 1991: 12; emphasis added). Different visions of democracy place different weights on the normative importance of each of these principles.[7] Fishkin himself accepts that, in practice, it is difficult to realise all three to an equal degree; trade-offs emerge in different models.[8] Competitive democracy, associated with Schumpeter (1962) and Dahl (1989), places great weight on political equality by ensuring all citizens have an equal vote at the selection stage, with less emphasis on deliberation. Elite deliberation, places little weight on political equality, instead emphasising the Madisonian "'indirect filtration' of mass public opinion" (Fishkin, 2009: 70). Deliberative democracy, necessarily, embodies deliberation, but has an ambivalent commitment to non-tyranny. These principles, thus, allow scope for normative disagreement over the extent to which each should be prioritised in the design of a democratic system, while still providing a meaningful set of theoretical expectations against which a system's democratic process may be evaluated.

Fishkin's principles correspond closely with the key stages of a democratic system. Political equality is the "equal consideration of political preferences" (Fishkin, 2009: 43). Thus, when citizens' demands enter the political system, the selection process should give individuals an equal chance to voice their political preferences at the input stage. Deliberation is then the "process by which (selected)

[7] Helpfully, Fishkin's three conditions broadly correlate with the three basic functions Warren (2017: 43-45) holds that a democratic political system must perform: empowering inclusions, enabling the formation of a collective will, and generating binding collective decisions.
[8] Fishkin (2009: 32) refers to this as the "trilemma" of democratic reform… Indeed, he recognises that a political system may satisfy one or two of the three conditions, and actively undermine the rest (Fishkin, 1991: 29).

individuals sincerely weigh the merits of competing arguments in discussions together" (Fishkin, 2009: 33). This occurs after receiving the inputs (citizens' demands) but before outputs (policy decisions) are produced, constituting a throughput stage of a system. Finally, the decision that is taken (or not taken) must not "impose severe deprivations of essential interests when an alternative policy could be chosen" (Fishkin, 2009: 62). This principle can be applied to substantive outcomes, but, for our purposes, it can be used for procedural evaluation; that is, examining the extent to which a system is designed with the intention of avoiding tyrannical consequences, either by a majority or a minority.

These principles are summarised in Table 2.1, corresponding with the stages of a political system through which inputs are democratically converted into outputs. This provides a general framework for the study of legitimacy in any political system. Where the system meets the expected democratic principle, we would have reason to expect citizens to perceive that stage of the system to be legitimate. On the contrary, where a system fails to meet these democratic expectations, citizens may develop negative evaluations of its procedural performance. Against these principles, therefore, this framework can be used to diagnose a democratic deficit in the way a political system is perceived to operate, and to help prescribe an appropriate remedy.

	Stage of Political System		
	Input ➔	**Throughput** ➔	**Output**
Process feature	Selection of decision-makers	Decision-making	Public policy decisions
Expected democratic principle	Political equality	Deliberation	Non-tyranny

Table 2.1: *Democratic principles expected at different stages of a political system*

At this stage, two qualifications should be attached to the framework presented. First, it does not rigidly imply that each of Fishkin's democratic conditions can only be realised at a single stage of the system; they are transferable across different stages of decision-making. For example, both political equality and non-tyranny are likely to be desirable principles in the throughput stage of decision-making, in addition to deliberation. Similarly, deliberation may be a desirable feature in the selection of decision-makers at the input stage, such as during an election campaign. The goal of the framework summarised in Table 2.1 is simply to identify the stages of decision-making at which the delivery (or otherwise) of each respective principle is most relevant and tangible.

Second, it is important to note that in later work Fishkin (2009: 45) adds *participation* as a fourth condition for a fully realised version of democracy, defined as "behaviour on the part of members of the mass public directed at influencing, directly or indirectly, the formulation, adoption, or implementation of governmental or policy choices." However, the present framework proceeds with Fishkin's original specification on the basis that its three conditions correspond most closely to the object of investigation: can the application of deliberative mini-publics help to control democratic deficits? By definition, as will be discussed later in this chapter, mini-publics do not directly promote mass participation. Opportunities for all citizens to be politically involved can be created alongside the establishment of a mini-public, but the focus of the present research is on the specific contribution that mini-publics can make to the perceived legitimacy of a political system, and how their institutional design may most effectively enhance it. The question of broader political participation by the maxi-public will be revisited in the discussion section in Chapter Eight.

2.3 Controlling a Democratic Deficit with Mini-Publics

The next step is to consider what prescription, if any, constitutes an appropriate response to a democratic deficit. It is not just *political* systems whose observed performance can fall short of some set of predefined expectations. Many types of system are designed with this scenario in mind. When observed performance, *y*, is unequal to expected performance, *v*, a system contains error, *e* (Leigh, 2012). In anticipation of these conditions, "*control* systems are engineered to achieve their objective in spite of prior uncertainties about characteristics of the controlled object, and about the exogenous variables" (Jacobs, 1993: 1; emphasis added). Leigh (2012: 9) notes that a system must often "neutralise adverse characteristics in the process, compensating for non-ideal process configurations and for short- and long-term perturbations and variabilities." To this end, a feedback loop can provide critical, continually updated information on system performance. When it is deficient, a sensor detects the error and a controller is activated to correct the system's performance, avoiding failure (Morris, 1991; Doyle *et al.* 1992; Lyshevski, 2000; Nise, 2011; Dorf and Bishop, 2011; Sabanovic and Ohnishi, 2011; Leigh, 2012).

Controllers are applied to everyday systems. A thermostat in an electric shower provides feedback on whether or not the water is at the desired temperature, leaving a controller to regulate it as necessary. This prevents the water from getting too hot or too cold (Albertos and Mareels, 2010: 13). If turbulence alters an aircraft's heading or altitude, the autopilot directs corrective signals to the aircraft's control surfaces to maintain a stable configuration (Pamadi, 2004: 617). Similarly, in the human body, numerous vital systems, from the nervous system to the gastrointestinal system, rely on thyroid hormones to control homeostatic processes (Sirakov and Plateroti, 2011). Figure 2.2 illustrates the generic design of such control systems.

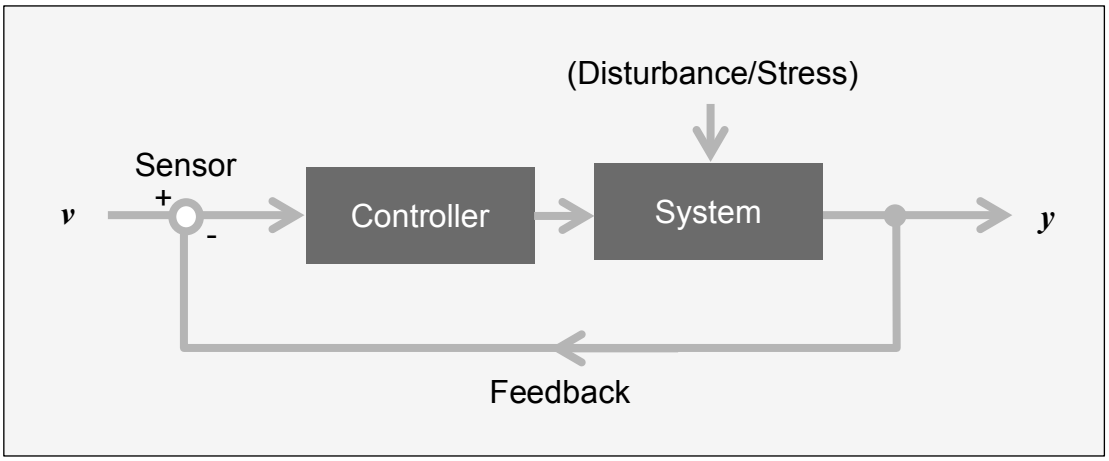

Figure 2.2: *A general control system (adapted from Leigh, 2012: 19)*

A political system is qualitatively different to other types of system in obvious ways: a thermometer cannot directly measure the effectiveness of its performance, and fluctuations in its expected behaviour cannot be controlled by precise autopilot adjustments. However, if we accept the conceptualisation of political decision-making as a *system* and, more specifically, Easton's conceptualisation of feedback as a short-term measure of a system's perceived legitimacy, we can introduce the idea of system control. In other words, if feedback signals a gap between the expected democratic behaviour of the system and citizens' observations of how the system performs, particularly when the system encounters an episode of stress, could an appropriate controller be engineered into the design of the system to address the error and so enhance perceptions of its procedural performance?

Attempting to modify political systems with democratic reforms has been a popular endeavour among political scientists for some time, but not all potential reforms are equally desirable or appropriate. Saward (2003: 168) voices his caution (with emphasis in the original):

> The single most important question when thinking through the new possibilities for democracy is this: *which devices, singly and in combination, enact desired interpretations of democratic principles within and across the different stages of the decision-making process?*

In recent decades, democratic theorists' prescriptions for democratic deficits have tended to converge on deliberative democracy (Manin, 1987; Habermas, 1994; Fishkin, 1995; Cohen, 1997; Elster, 1998; Dryzek, 2000; Chambers, 2003; Goodin, 2003; Gutmann and Thompson, 2004; Nabatchi, 2010). With this "deliberative turn" in theory, democratic legitimacy came to be seen in corresponding terms (Dryzek, 2000: 1). Deliberative democratic prescriptions are distinct from participatory models, but they typically involve the participation of ordinary citizens in decision-making.[9]

Even critics acknowledge the prominence of deliberative democratic advocacy in contemporary political thought, but critics' concerns rest on a readily surmountable observation: that deliberative democrats are idealists who are "uninterested in pressing questions of *institutional design* and *legitimacy*" (Achen and Bartels, 2016: 301; emphasis added). Such criticisms from democratic 'realists' overlook a growing trend to connect deliberative theory to democratic *practice*. James Fishkin's (1995; 2009; 2018) work lies at this intersection, and he enjoys growing company (Parkinson and Mansbridge, 2012; Grönlund *et al.* 2014; Reuchamps and Suiter, 2016). If deliberative democracy is to be an effective response to a particular democratic deficit, we must consider what value this

[9] See Fishkin (2009) on the distinction between deliberative and participatory models of democracy.

approach would add to the existing democratic system – with respect to the fulfilment of the three democratic principles identified (Fishkin, 2009).[10]

Thus, with Saward's (2003) advice in mind, could this approach help to 'fix' democracy when it goes wrong? Specifically, could deliberative democracy help to control perceived deficiencies in the legitimacy of a political system? In a rare empirical study investigating the demand for deliberative participation, Neblo *et al.* (2010) offer encouragement. They find that it is precisely people who are disengaged from conventional politics – centred on electoral competition between political parties – who are particularly willing to participate in deliberative processes. The results of their study suggest that applications of deliberative democracy can indeed help to better meet citizens' expectations by offering a constructive alternative to 'politics as usual'.

A crucial obstacle has been that many practical applications of deliberative democracy have been limited in scope to one-off, small-scale experiments.[11] Increasingly, however, mini-publics have been formally institutionalised, affirming their potential to complement and enhance the democratic contribution of existing institutions. They are broadly defined as "a class of institutions that directly engage citizens" and "promote democratic deliberation" in decision-making (Ryan and Smith, 2014: 9). Indeed, the very term 'mini-public' is often preceded by the adjective 'deliberative' to emphasise this quality. Such bodies are typically

[10] Elsewhere, Fishkin (2009: 95) sets out four central questions to consider for any prescribed institutional response: "First, … how inclusive is it? … Second, … how thoughtful is it? … Third, … what effects does it have? … Fourth, under what social and political conditions can any of this be accomplished?" The first three essentially correspond to Fishkin's three democratic principles and can be evaluated at each respective stage of the decision-making process (input, throughput and output); the fourth concerns the particular context.

[11] *Participedia* (2018) provides an extensive record of citizen-based decision-making initiatives around the world. At the time of writing, 689 unique cases were listed.

established with a problem-solving role (Fung, 2003: 340), and can take a variety of different formats (see Setälä and Smith, 2018: 301).

Citizens' juries usually involve 12-36 randomly selected participants who consider a particular issue over a number of days, before producing their recommendations in a report (Smith and Wales, 1999; Coote and Lenaghan, 1997; Parkinson, 2006). *Planning cells* have been institutionalised in Germany; multiple cells run in parallel with one another, each comprising 25 participants who make recommendations on (usually) local policy issues with a technical focus (Dienel and Renn, 1995; Flynn, 2009). *Consensus conferences* share many features of citizens' juries, except that they allow interested citizens to apply to participate. Those selected spend several weekends preparing in advance of the public conference to identify expert witnesses they would like to question, as well as developing the relevant questions they would like to ask them (Hendriks, 2005; Dryzek and Tucker, 2008). *Deliberative Polling* ®, meanwhile, seeks to measure informed public opinion, gathering a large, representative sample of the target population (usually at least 200 participants), who gather to learn and deliberate about a topic before voting on preferred outcomes (Fishkin *et al.* 2000; Fishkin, 2018).[12] While they vary in scale, institutional design, and consequence, these different models of mini-public provide a common demonstration that deliberative democracy is much more than an abstract idea.

Beyond these four models described, there is a more durable variety of mini-public that is arguably "more impressive" in ambition (Smith, 2009: 29), and may be explicitly designed to 'co-govern' alongside existing, traditional democratic institutions at the highest level of a political system: a *citizens' assembly*. This more

[12] See also Rowe and Frewer (2005).

formalised device is defined by three main features: its large number of (citizen) members are randomly selected, they deliberate over an extended period of time on a substantive, contested, issue (or issues), and they take a collective decision (or decisions) to be fed directly into the broader political process. Fournier *et al.* (2011: 10) contend that a citizens' assembly is the "only method of citizen policy-making" that combines each of these characteristics, constituting "the most extensive modern form of collective decision-making by common folk." For Smith (2012: 91), this institutionalised application of deliberative democracy represents "a step-change in the practice of mini-publics." Valid criticisms of deliberative democracy should accordingly move beyond any denial of its basic practicality; instead, the contemporary challenge for deliberative democrats is to establish how mini-publics can be effectively coupled with the broader political system (Parkinson, 2006; Mansbridge *et al.* 2012; Setälä and Smith, 2018). Before considering the potential for citizens' assemblies to enhance the perceived legitimacy of a political system by promoting specific democratic principles, it is first appropriate to review their origins, applications, and institutional features.

2.4 Citizens' Assemblies as a 'Step-Change' in Mini-Public Practice

The idea of institutionalising a citizen-based deliberative body is a radical one, but far from original. The earliest forms of democracy share core features of the 'citizens' assemblies' we now describe as democratic innovations (Smith, 2009). In ancient Athens and other city-states, citizens directly engaged in political debate and decision-making (Thucydides, 1972). All citizens in good standing (males with

military training) could vote on important decisions as members of the *ekklēsia* (general assembly). Most decisions, however, were taken by a smaller, more carefully defined body, the *boule* (council) (Fournier *et al.* 2011). It comprised approximately five hundred members who were drawn by lot to serve for one year.[13] These randomly selected citizens took decisions on a daily basis on behalf of the *dēmos* (the people at large) and prepared legislation to be considered by the *ekklēsia*. All citizens had an equal probability of being appointed to the *boule* (Tridimas, 2011), and those selected for the task would engage in extensive deliberation (Cammack, 2013). This form of decision-making in the hands of ordinary citizens was, thus, a key feature of what Dahl (1989) calls the first democratic transformation. As the nation-state replaced the city-state as the dominant form of political organisation, citizens came to play a much less direct role in political decision-making (Dahl, 1989).

Millennia later, citizens' assemblies have been established to fulfil a number of specific purposes, complementing conventional representative institutions. In the Canadian province of British Columbia, the provincial government set up a citizens' assembly in 2004 to consider the controversial issue of electoral reform.[14] After spending nearly a year learning, consulting, and deliberating about the issue, the body of 160 randomly selected citizens recommended changing the electoral system in the province (Warren and Pearse, 2008). The recommendation was put to a province-wide referendum the following year and was supported by 57 percent of voters. While this level of support fell slightly short of the 60 percent threshold required to change the voting system, the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly

[13] Members were selected by a kleroterion, a relatively sophisticated concrete randomisation device (Mirhady and Schwarz, 2011).
[14] For a detailed background on the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly (BCCA), see Warren and Pearse (2008).

provided a pioneering model of how deliberative democracy can be formally institutionalised on a large scale. Comparable bodies were set up by governments in Ontario and the Netherlands in 2006, also on the issue of electoral reform (Fournier *et al.* 2011). Civil society organisations have also played a role in the development of large-scale mini-publics: the Belgian G1000 citizens' summit in 2011 covered a variety of contested policy areas (Jacquet *et al.* 2016), and citizens' assemblies in the United Kingdom have recently considered a number of constitutional issues (Flinders *et al.* 2016; Renwick *et al.* 2018). In the UK, the first state-sponsored citizens' assembly was held in 2017, commissioned by parliamentary committees to examine future funding options for adult social care (Involve, 2018a).

The Republic of Ireland offers the most comprehensive case study on the formal embedding of deliberative mini-publics within national decision-making. The first step on its innovative journey of democratic experimentation took the form of 'We the Citizens', a pilot citizens' assembly sponsored by a non-governmental organisation and organised by an academic team (Farrell *et al.* 2013). The initiative demonstrated proof of concept, paving the way for randomly chosen citizens to constitute a majority of members of the Irish Constitutional Convention. It was commissioned up by the Irish government in 2013 to consider a number of possible reforms, ranging from reducing the voting age to legalising same-sex marriage. This body was notable for its hybrid membership profile, featuring both 66 randomly selected lay citizens and 33 representatives appointed by political parties (Suiter *et al.* 2016). Although not a citizens' assembly in the purest sense of the term, it can still be recognised as a "mixed" version that shares many core features (Setälä and Smith, 2018: 303). Two of its recommendations were put to a referendum in 2015, one of which was endorsed and implemented. Politically, one of the most notable

outcomes of the Convention was the Irish government's subsequent decision in 2016 to establish a (pure version of a) citizens' assembly on a further set of issues, this time featuring a membership of 99 randomly chosen citizens. One of its recommendations, to amend the Constitution to allow the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament) to legislate for abortion, was endorsed by 66 percent of voters in a 2018 referendum (Field, 2018).

A growing consensus is emerging in Ireland that citizens' assemblies offer a useful vehicle for considering contested and/or sensitive issues, with positive signals from political elites that they could be used again to help address political problems (Farrell *et al.* 2018). Still, the uptake of this kind of mini-public tends to be in response to relatively narrow contested policy matters on an ad hoc basis (Setälä, 2017). Nowhere has a citizens' assembly been institutionalised on a permanent footing with a more comprehensive remit, although it has been suggested that large-scale deliberative mini-publics could serve as a template for the reform of upper chambers in bicameral legislatures (Dryzek, 2017). It is not necessarily a weakness that citizens' assemblies have been limited in duration and scope; their adaptability to particular contexts can be regarded as a significant strength. However, if such bodies are to target deeper problems with the democratic *system*, beyond narrow policy disputes, we need to consider how they can also enhance the quality of the democratic process as perceived by citizens. In other words, can the application of citizens' assemblies help to address underlying democratic deficits, as well as serving the purpose of tackling specific issues? There are specific design elements of citizens' assemblies that suggest this form of mini-public decision-making will be positively evaluated by the maxi-public for its promotion of core democratic principles.

2.4.1 Citizens' Assembly Selection: Promoting Political Equality

The selection process involves two key components: members of a citizens' assembly are, by definition, citizens, and they are chosen by sortition. Put another way, members are not politicians and they are not elected. All citizens are automatically in the pool of candidates from which a "mechanical or 'non-human' process" selects members of the political body (Dowlen, 2017: 1). The idea that representatives can be randomly chosen from the mass public is not completely alien to most citizens; beyond Ancient Athens, legal juries offer a relatable contemporary example of lay individuals playing a consequential role in decision-making (Warren, 2008). However, while sortition has strong claims to political equality, a general lack of familiarity with the procedure and its theoretical rationale may undermine support for this selection mechanism.

Sortition may facilitate the selection of a highly representative sample of citizens, but it still involves a "blind" lottery with "no identifiable agent who can be held responsible for its outcome" (Dowlen, 2017: 4). Political elites themselves may be apprehensive of ceding control over the selection of a supplementary democratic body (Donnelly, 2015). It is partly for this reason that the Irish Constitutional Convention comprised a hybrid membership, with two-thirds of members being randomly-selected citizens and the remaining third being elected representatives appointed to the Convention by political parties (Farrell *et al.* 2013). The subsequent Irish Citizens' Assembly, however, was selected exclusively by sortition, apparently with little fear from the Irish government that a move to a purely randomly selected body would weaken perceptions of its legitimacy. Therefore, concerns over the novelty of this selection mechanism may be overblown; perhaps its substantive benefits become swiftly appreciated.

Since the electoral process of selecting representatives systematically excludes certain types of individual, the use of random selection to establish a citizens' assembly may be particularly appealing to individuals under-represented by an existing system. Indeed, the very logic of random selection is to draw a representative sample of the population in which every member has an equal chance of being chosen (Stone, 2016). This mechanism gives a citizens' assembly a powerful, representative quality based firmly on the principle of political equality (Dahl, 1989 Ferejohn, 2008; Bouricius, 2013). The descriptive similarity of a citizens' assembly to the wider population underpins a powerful claim to its democratic legitimacy (James, 2008). Fournier *et al.* (2011: 31) recognise this close relationship between the "representative character" of the selected members and "establishing their legitimacy" as a decision-making body.

2.4.2 Citizens' Assembly Decision-Making: Promoting Deliberation

Citizens' assemblies are explicitly designed to facilitate structured deliberation among members; that is, after participants have spent time learning about the main elements of a particular issue and after they have consulted with a wide range of relevant views, often over multiple weekends, they evaluate different arguments and collectively consider how the common interest can be best served. At a minimum, Fishkin (2009: 33) refers to deliberation as "the process by which individuals sincerely weigh the merits of competing arguments in discussions together." Steiner (2012: 4) notes that the word 'deliberate' derives from the Latin '*deliberare*', meaning "to weigh, to ponder, and to reflect." It is not enough for participants to simply state their individual preferences; rather, they are challenged to justify their

preferences with reasons, and to be open to revising their initial preferences if they encounter more compelling arguments (Habermas, 1979; Dryzek, 2000; Gutmann and Thompson, 2004). Their views may end up remaining roughly constant throughout the process, but deliberation is often associated with shifts in attitudes towards a specific issue, about which individuals may have previously known little, as they have the opportunity to align their preferences with their underlying values (Barabas, 2004; Fishkin, 2009).

In the deliberative phase of a citizens' assembly, members typically engage in verbal dialogue with one another in small groups (Pearse, 2008). Each group's table is provided with a trained, independent facilitator "to ensure that every member [has] an opportunity to speak; that discussions [stay] on topic; and that members [are] respectful of other opinions" (Suiter *et al.* 2016: 42). The quality of deliberation can depend on a variety of different conditions (Fishkin, 2009: 34), including the balance of information presented to participants (Barabas, 2004; Esterling *et al.* 2013), the diversity of the participants themselves (Young, 2000; Bergold, 2017), the influence of facilitators on conversational dynamics (Steiner, 2012; Yaylaci and Beauvais, 2017), the nature of the topic (Farrar *et al.* 2010), and how the initiative is framed (Druckman, 2004), and the decision rule (Karpowitz *et al.* 2012).

In real-world mini-publics, deliberation has been operationalised as an external process involving face-to-face communication. However, for Robert Goodin, the (internal) act of thinking is more important than the (external) act of speaking in a deliberative exercise. "Conversation is useful, but imagination is essential," for meaningful deliberation to occur (Goodin, 2003: 228). In an empirical study of a mini-public process with Simon Niemeyer, the authors find that the effect of cognitive processing on opinion change is greater than the effect of group

discussion (Goodin and Niemeyer, 2003). This is not to say that interpersonal communication should not be an element of mini-public decision-making, but it highlights different possible priorities for process design, especially if a certain mode of deliberation comes into tension with other democratic principles. For example, if the perceived legitimacy of a citizens' assembly rests heavily on the *ex ante* basis that all members of the population have an equal chance of being selected, talk-based deliberation among participants should not be problematic. If, however, its perceived legitimacy also rests on the *ex post* basis that its process of decision-making would yield the same distribution of post-deliberative preferences if the entire population could be present to deliberate, the violation of statistical independence among participants presents a serious problem for external validity.

Such a problem could be overcome by facilitating deliberative decision-making as an internal exercise rather than an external one. Beyond direct contact, studies in social psychology have explored the possibilities of imagined inter-group contact (Crisp *et al.* 2009; Crisp and Turner, 2009; Husnu and Crisp, 2010; Vezzali *et al.* 2015; West *et al.* 2015). They consistently find that it is possible to replicate the effects of direct contact with imagined dialogue; and similar effects have been observed in recent political applications of imagined deliberation (Warner and Villamil, 2017; Garry, 2016a). In short, while citizens' assemblies are associated with a particular mode of deliberation, certain considerations may warrant a degree of flexibility over the way in which the decision-making process is designed.

Indeed, by arguing that citizens' assemblies can, in part, enhance the perceived legitimacy of a political system by adding deliberation, the *mode* of deliberation may be important at the individual-level. Hansen (1997) reports that the strength of an individual's party identification has a positive, significant effect on his

or her likelihood to talk about politics with others. As Mutz (2006: 136) argues, "political communication of the face-to-face variety is among the most difficult forms of social interaction to negotiate." Most people do not have strong partisan identities (Dalton, 2002); moreover, most people tend to be apolitical when they interact with others (Warren, 1996). Therefore, individuals who are less partisan may be more supportive of a decision-making process featuring imagined deliberation, whereas individuals with stronger partisan identities will be more likely to support talk-based deliberation.

However it is operationalised in practice, the emphasis on some form of deliberation in citizens' assembly decision-making is likely to be attractive to individuals who find themselves disillusioned with conventional political processes. MacKuen *et al.* (2010) contend that deliberation and partisanship underpin two distinct psychological approaches to decision-making: the former is resistant to the consideration of different perspectives and arguments, while the latter is open to reflection on new information. The individual-level distinction is supported by Neblo *et al.* (2010), whose experimental study finds higher levels of enthusiasm for deliberation among those without a strong level of party identification. If a democratic deficit arises in part due to the partisan characterisation of decision-making, the emphasis on deliberation offered by a citizens' assembly could help to meet the expectations of those least satisfied with the existing process.

2.4.2 Citizens' Assembly Decision-Taking: Promoting Non-Tyranny

Finally, once a citizens' assembly has taken a collective, informed decision, the status of its decision may influence the extent to which the body is perceived to have

a legitimate role that can enhance the broader political system. Should it produce a binding decision, or should it be limited to providing advisory recommendations? If the latter, what further decision-taking mechanism should be necessary for the recommendation(s) to be implemented? Political elites are likely to have a vested interest in reducing the level of power of a mini-public, suspicious of any 'rival' body that may challenge their own authority. In a series of interviews with elected politicians in Northern Ireland, Donnelly (2015) detected provisional support for a citizens' assembly among elected representatives. However, this support is highly conditional on the supplementary body having only a consultative or advisory role.

Indeed, of all the real-world citizens' assemblies that have been established, none have had the capacity to take a final, legally binding decision.[15] Fournier *et al.* (2011) claim that a ratification referendum adds a significant degree of legitimacy to the final decision of a citizens' assembly. In the cases of British Columbia and Ontario, the advance commitment by each of the provincial governments to hold a popular vote on the respective citizens' assembly decisions enhanced citizens' evaluations of the process: "given the novelty of the institutional design, it was probably a reassuring safeguard" for both the maxi-public and political elites (Fournier *et al.* 2011: 154).

The idea of a 'safeguard' takes us to Fishkin's third democratic principle. Non-tyranny is associated with the avoidance of a decision that could violate the essential interests of a particular individual or group when an alternative course of action was available. Unlike political equality and deliberation, this principle "is not internal to the design of the democratic process, but rather it provides a way of

[15] In a citizens' assembly in Gdańsk, the city's mayor pledged to implement any decisions of the mini-public that received the support of at least 80 percent of its members (Gerwin, 2018). This may have rendered certain decisions politically binding, but they did not carry legal weight without the endorsement of the municipal authorities. See Chapter Seven for a more detailed discussion.

evaluating its effects" (Fishkin, 2009: 60). However, different decision-making processes could increase or decrease the likelihood of such outcomes arising. One approach to help prevent tyrannical policies is to build checks into the system, distributing power across multiple sites. While some forms of mini-public strive for consensus, the support of a simple majority of members in a citizens' assembly (under a secret ballot) is typically sufficient for a decision to pass (Smith, 2012: 101-102); the likelihood of harmful decisions being taken may be reduced if there is a higher (internal) threshold, such as a super-majority rule, or if the decision must be (externally) endorsed by a majority of all voters in a referendum.

There is, however, a potential downside of subjecting a citizens' assembly decision to a referendum. Most notably, the very nature of a referendum privileges aggregation over deliberation. In a deliberative mini-public, members take a collective decision that reflects their considered preferences on a given issue, not their raw, unconsidered preferences. If a referendum campaign fails to promote genuine deliberation, it may undermine the deliberative decision-making phase of a citizens' assembly. In the British Columbia case, Ratner (2008: 161) emphasised the contrast between the high quality of deliberation in the citizens' assembly and the "transgressions of rational discourse" across the wider electorate. Yet at the same time, there is evidence that many voters in the referendum were guided precisely by the deliberative recommendation provided by the preceding citizens' assembly. Survey data show that those who were aware of the work of the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly were more likely to support its advisory decision. Citizens who knew little about it were just as likely to oppose its recommendation as support it, whereas those who knew something about the process were significantly more likely to use their vote to ratify its decision (Cutler *et al.* 2008: 176). Therefore, while there

is a paradox between the deliberative characteristics of a citizens' assembly and the aggregative characteristics of a referendum, Fournier *et al.* (2011) suggest the two could complement one another.[16] The latter could help act as a 'check' on the former, cumulatively enhancing perceptions of legitimacy (Bouricius, 2013).

Alternatively, a decision-making process featuring a citizens' assembly could be designed to formally give politicians the authority to accept or reject its recommendation(s). This approach would fulfil the logic of establishing a mini-public to *complement*, rather than challenge, the existing representative institutions of a political system (Grönlund *et al.* 2014). This could add legitimacy to the process by promoting more politically equal inputs and delivering a more deliberative throughput stage of decision-making, but political representatives would retain the final say over any outputs. However, the relative success of this kind of co-decision-making is likely to depend on the context. If, for example, gridlock among political elites is a major contributing factor behind a democratic deficit, a mini-public decision will only help to unlock this gridlock if political elites agree *in advance* to endorse it. It is worth highlighting that, for Fishkin, tyrannical outcomes can arise from policy *omission* as well as policy *commission*. In other words, the consent of political elites may serve to sustain tyrannical outcomes in some extreme cases, rather than to serve as a check on mini-public decisions. Therefore, the extent to which citizens' assembly decisions should be binding or advisory depends on the nature of the democratic deficit this kind of body seeks to control.

[16] A majority of voters (57 percent) did endorse the citizens' assembly recommendation to change British Columbia's electoral system. This fell short of the super-majority (60 percent) required to implement the decision. In this case, the failure of the citizens' assembly decision to produce a substantive outcome was not necessarily the result of its decision being put to a popular referendum, but more the fact that the referendum had a super-majority threshold. Thus, Fournier *et al.* (2011) argue that a super-majority threshold should not be required if the preceding deliberative process (in a citizens' assembly) has been of a high standard.

2.5 Conclusion

Reflecting on the pioneering case from British Columbia, Fournier *et al.* (2011: 155) suggest that the optimal conditions for establishing a citizens' assembly "are when there is widespread recognition of the existence of a problem and the perception that the political system has failed to produce a satisfactory solution." This chapter has set out a framework for identifying a basic problem – a democratic deficit – and argued that citizens' assemblies could offer a meaningful, targeted solution. By conceptualising democratic decision-making as a dynamic system, it argues that citizens continually evaluate its procedural performance. When it fails to meet their expectations for the delivery of political equality, deliberation and non-tyranny, citizens' perceptions of the legitimacy of decision-making will be more negative than positive overall, constituting a democratic deficit.

Under these conditions, citizens' assemblies have specific institutional features that are likely to strengthen the perceived legitimacy of decision-making. They promote political equality through the selection of members: ordinary citizens are randomly chosen from the wider population to serve. This representative group of members engage in structured decision-making underpinned by an explicit commitment to deliberation. After learning about an issue and weighing up the possible ways forward, the citizens collectively reach a decision, helping to overcome any tyrannical consequences of policy inertia. In short, by supplementing the existing institutions of a political system, citizens' assemblies can help to control a democratic deficit by promoting the democratic values that existing institutions are struggling to deliver. These are the theoretical expectations that now require empirical investigation.

The issues raised in this chapter are relevant, to varying degrees, to all democratic political systems, any one of which could serve as a useful case study for such an investigation. However, they are particularly relevant to democracies with deep divisions. Political systems in these polities are often intentionally designed to reduce the potential for violent conflict by accommodating divided groups, usually by giving them the right to veto unfavourable decisions. While an elaborate set of institutional arrangements may be necessary to promote peace, they may create new challenges for stable and effective democratic governance, especially if gridlock is the norm. We therefore turn to the post-conflict case of Northern Ireland, where a consociational political system has helped to overcome the grave problem of ethnic conflict, but where the poor quality of democracy now poses a different kind of problem. The next chapter assesses the extent of this democratic deficit, serving as a necessary step before considering the extent to which a citizens' assembly could help to address some of its most troublesome symptoms.

Chapter Three

DIAGNOSING A DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT IN A DEEPLY DIVIDED PLACE

THE CASE OF THE CONSOCIATIONAL POLITICAL SYSTEM OF NORTHERN IRELAND

> *Apollo 13*: [I]t looks to me, looking out the hatch, that we are venting something. We are venting something into the – into space.
>
> *Mission Control*: Roger. We copy your venting.
>
> Radio communication between Apollo 13 and Mission Control, 13 April 1970 (NASA, 1970: 163)

Political systems vary according to institutional design and the surrounding environment in which they are embedded. Not all types of institutional design are equally appropriate to different polities, and not all societal environments are equally conducive to the smooth operation of any system of democratic decision-making, however designed. The deeply divided polity of Northern Ireland offers such an example, where ethnic conflict once appeared intractable (Whyte, 1981; Dixon, 2001). The violence waged over the three decades of the Troubles was rooted in centuries-old mutually reinforcing cleavages encompassing religion, national

identity, and ethno-national ideology.[17] The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement of 1998 offered the basis of an institutional solution.[18] By systematically accommodating the different interests of Northern Ireland's rival groups, it prescribed a set of consociational institutions designed to meet the challenging governmental needs of a deeply divided place (McGarry and O'Leary, 2006).[19]

Some two decades after its formal establishment, this chapter appraises the democratic performance of Northern Ireland's devolved political system.[20] It does so by first setting out the consociational nature of the system before considering the associated challenges of delivering Fishkin's (1991) core democratic principles at the input, throughput and output stages of decision-making – both in theory and in practice. Are decision-makers selected in a way that promotes political equality? Is the decision-making process deliberative? Are there mechanisms in place to try and prevent decisions from being taken that are tyrannical? At each of these respective stages of the political system, citizens have good reason to be disappointed with its procedural performance. An initial exploration of relevant empirical data provides compelling evidence that a democratic deficit exists and is in need of urgent attention. The nature of the diagnosis suggests that the defining features of citizens' assemblies could help to strengthen the delivery of deficient democratic principles, and so to enhance the perceived legitimacy of Northern Ireland's political system from the perspective of the maxi-public.

[17] For analysis on the history surrounding the Northern Ireland question, which is beyond the scope of this thesis, see, for example Dixon (2001), Bew (2007), Jackson (2010) and Walker (2011).
[18] The official name is the 'Belfast Agreement', denoting the location in which it was signed. It is commonly known as the 'Good Friday Agreement', in reference to the date on which it was signed.
[19] The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement is not exclusively based on consociationalism (McGarry and O'Leary, 2009). It also covers broader constitutional issues, North-South relations in Ireland (Strand Two), British-Irish relations (Strand Three), human rights, decommissioning, security, policing and justice, and the release of prisoners (Northern Ireland Office, 1998). This comprehensive dispensation has been termed a "consociational plus" bargain (O'Leary, 1998: 11).
[20] Northern Ireland's political system is devolved within the United Kingdom.

3.1 Legitimacy in a Consociational Political System

There are four combined elements that distinguish consociations from other types of political system (Lijphart, 1977). First, members of the legislative branch must be selected on the basis of proportional representation (PR). Second, different groups must be represented in the executive branch to allow for inclusive decision-making. Third, these groups must possess mutual vetoes over political decisions deemed harmful to their essential group interests. Fourth, where appropriate, groups should be able to retain decision-making autonomy over certain domains.

Each of these conditions is met in the Northern Ireland context. Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly (MLAs) are elected using the Single Transferable Vote (PR-STV) electoral formula.[21] No single party, and no single group, can govern alone: the governing Executive must be an inclusive power-sharing coalition led by a dual premiership of one unionist and one nationalist.[22] Most items before the Assembly can be carried with the consent of a simple majority of MLAs, but, where deemed necessary, they must obtain the parallel consent of both a majority of unionist MLAs and a majority of nationalist MLAs.[23] Each community, therefore, possesses an effective veto. Finally, there is some group autonomy, most notably over education, but this element is omitted from the present discussion since it plays a relatively minor role in Northern Ireland's consociational design (Coakley, 2009), and since the present focus is on decision-making at the system-level.

[21] Farrell (2011: 157) shows that PR-STV provides a high degree of proportionality between a party's vote share and seat share, a higher average level than that demonstrated by Sainte-Laguë, D'Hondt and Droop proportional electoral formulas.

[22] The D'Hondt formula is used to allocate all Executive positions other than First Minister, deputy First Minister and Justice Minister; a party's legislative seat share is roughly proportional to the number of ministerial appointments. This prevents any major party "that wishes inclusion … from being denied access to office" (O'Leary *et al.* 2005: 199).

[23] Upon election, MLAs must designate as 'unionist', 'nationalist' or 'other'. A petition of concern may be submitted to the Speaker on any matter before the Assembly, provided it has the signed support of 30 MLAs. When this occurs, any vote on the matter of concern will require the parallel consent of a majority of unionist MLAs and a majority of nationalist MLAs.

The Good Friday Agreement – and the institutions it spawned – has been heralded globally as a success story for the application of consociational theory to the management of ethnic conflict (McGarry and O'Leary, 2009; McCulloch, 2014). Despite its international acclaim and the relative absence of violence since the signing of the Agreement, questionable levels of diffuse support towards the political system provide a daunting backdrop for stable democratic governance to take hold. Northern Ireland remains a deeply divided place (Guelke, 2012). On the religious dimension, Protestants and Catholics are evenly balanced according to the most recent census figures, constituting 42 percent and 40 percent of the population respectively (NISRA, 2011). Many political communities contain multiple religious cleavages, but in Northern Ireland they are compounded by diverging national identities. The Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey reports that a quarter of respondents consider themselves to be exclusively British, a quarter consider themselves to be exclusively Irish, and a further quarter consider themselves to be more one than the other (Ark, 2015). Just 16 percent consider themselves to be equally Irish and British. Under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement, Tonge (2013: 160) argues that there could effectively be "no such thing as disloyalty in Northern Ireland." It recognises the legitimate coexistence of multiple national identities. This quality, however, may paradoxically make it harder for citizens to feel a strong, common sense of loyalty towards any single political system.

Recent attitudinal research provides limited evidence that 'Northern Irishness' is emerging as a cross-cutting identity to unite adherents of the two traditional nationalities (McNicholl, 2017). Rival national identities help to fuel divergent preferences for Northern Ireland's long-term constitutional status. Fourteen percent of citizens would like to see Northern Ireland unified with the

Republic of Ireland, while one in five citizens would like to see Northern Ireland governed directly by the British government in London (Ark, 2015). Crucially, a narrow majority supports the existing arrangements as its long-term constitutional status: 51 percent support Northern Ireland remaining in the United Kingdom with a devolved power-sharing government. It is noteworthy that the constitutional status quo is supported by at least a majority of citizens, albeit within the margin of error, but Northern Ireland's current system of government hardly possesses what Easton (1965: 125) describes as a deep "reservoir of support." Indeed, the core ideological dimension of electoral competition in Northern Ireland remains that of ethno-nationalism, spanning unionists who want Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom and nationalists who advocate unification with the Republic of Ireland (Garry, 2016b). The United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union, which raises fundamental questions for Northern Ireland's constitutional position, has increased the salience of these ideological divisions (Murphy, 2018).[24]

The absence of traditional forms of diffuse support undoubtedly presents a challenge to the prospect of stable, democratic governance. As Easton (1975: 444) cautions, "Where (diffuse) support is negative, it represents a reserve of ill-will that may not be easily reduced by outputs or performance." Similarly, Norris (2011: 20) contends that for citizens to "accept the legitimacy of their state … [they] do not challenge the basic constitutional structure and rules of the game or the authority of office-holders." However, short of hugely disruptive (and, in themselves, destabilising) population transfers, this fundamental challenge will not disappear in Northern Ireland. Given the geographical distribution of Protestants and Catholics, British and Irish nationals, and unionist and nationalist ideologies, as well as the

[24] Not only did the decision reopen questions of identity, but it also raised questions about the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, as well as Northern Ireland's relationship with the rest of the UK. See Garry *et al.* (2018) for a study of public opinion toward these issues.

relative durability of these identities, there is no realistic scenario in which a new territorial arrangement could overcome the need for individuals of different ethnic groups to be governed under a shared political system. There are two lands, but only one soil (Wright, 1994).

In spite of the existence of multiple (exclusive) national identities and long-term constitutional preferences, the citizens of Northern Ireland gave a decisive expression of support to its short- to medium-term constitutional status. The Good Friday Agreement was overwhelmingly endorsed in a popular referendum in 1998. Of the 81 percent of voters who participated in the plebiscite, 71 percent voted in favour of the Agreement and just 29 percent against (Hayes and McAllister, 2001).[25] This legitimated the establishment of Northern Ireland's consociational system of government. In addition, crucially, the Agreement's 'principle of consent' asserts the right of individuals to hold divergent constitutional aspirations in the long-term while endorsing a devolved political system within Northern Ireland. By recognising "the legitimacy of whatever choice is freely exercised by a majority of the people of Northern Ireland with regard to its status," in the United Kingdom or otherwise, it allows both supporters of the status quo and supporters of change a vehicle for pursuing their long-term preference (Belfast Agreement, 1998: 2).[26] The principle of consent, thus, offers "constructive ambiguity" (Bell and Cavanaugh, 1998: 1355).

This provision may be imperfect, and is certainly unusual, but it reflects hard-nosed constitutional pragmatism. Without the principle of consent, it is uncertain that a peace settlement could have emerged in 1998; its acceptance

[25] Turnout in the 1998 referendum was the second-highest recorded in a post-war vote in Northern Ireland (Hayes and McAllister, 2001: 79).
[26] The Northern Ireland Act (1998: s.1(2)) states that, "the Secretary of State shall exercise the power (to call a referendum) if at any time it appears likely to him that a majority of those voting would express a wish that Northern Ireland should cease to be part of the United Kingdom and form part of a united Ireland."

"effectively undercut the rationale for violence" (MacGinty and Darby, 2002: 177). If the Good Friday Agreement is evaluated purely as a conflict management device, it appears to have been successful to date. For McGarry and O'Leary (2009: 51), above all else, Northern Ireland's peace settlement is "causally associated with a highly significant reduction in political violence." Ceasefires of paramilitary groups have held up; while dissident republican groups continue to pose a security threat, they do not enjoy popular support.[27]

However, Wilford and Wilson (2001) argue that the primacy of securing peace had an unintended consequence: insufficient attention to the democratic design of the devolved political system. If Northern Ireland's consociational arrangements are evaluated for their ability to provide a successful democratic system of government, robust critiques emerge. The most serious contends that 'consociational democracy' is an oxymoron: a political system can be democratic or consociational, but not both (Barry, 1975). For Taylor (2006: 220), "consociationalism and liberal democracy pull in different directions." Proponents dismiss these assertions on pragmatic grounds. Brendan O'Leary argues that consociationalists are realists; they recognise that the choice facing a deeply divided society is "between consociational democracy and no (worthwhile) democracy at all" (O'Leary, 2005: 9). Even the more generous critics of consociations acknowledge that it is difficult to imagine a workable alternative strategy (Guelke, 2009).

By accepting a trade-off, O'Leary demonstrates that consociation offers a pathway towards a deeper form of democracy, but it does not necessarily represent a final destination in itself. Compared to its application in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia, McCulloch (2014) notes the relative success of consociation in Northern

[27] Horgan and Morrison (2011) report a rising threat posed by dissident republicans, but do not suggest that they are gaining significant influence within the republican community.

Ireland, but acknowledges its limits in delivering stable, post-conflict democracy. Her caution echoes Morrow (2005: 45): "All societies contain conflict. Divided societies, however, often struggle to find and implement democratic institutions that can manage conflict in ways that can be accepted as *legitimate*" (emphasis added).

Thus, despite their disagreement on its relative merits, critics and proponents of consociation essentially share the view that the potential quality of democratic performance will inevitably be constrained. They may, therefore, hold similarly low expectations regarding the capacity of Northern Ireland's devolved political system to adequately satisfy Fishkin's three democratic principles of political equality, deliberation, and non-tyranny. Accordingly, we will now explore the extent to which the system meets these principles, or whether there is likely to be a gap between citizens' expectations and their observations of the system's procedural performance in Northern Ireland. We will do so by reviewing the three key stages of this system: the selection of political representatives, the process of making decisions, and the final taking of decisions. While consociations vary by precise design, the application of their core features to Northern Ireland makes it a highly generalisable case.

3.1.1 The Challenge of Promoting Political Equality

In a consociational political system, who decides? As in all other contemporary representative democracies, principal political decision-makers are selected by elections. Voting has become such an intrinsic part of democratic political systems over the last three centuries that it has come to be regarded as the crucial mechanism establishing the system's claim to represent its citizens' demands (see Pitkin, 1967). Notably, Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights explicitly requires

the holding of elections as a necessary condition of democratic government: "The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of the government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections" (UN General Assembly, 1948). Universal suffrage provides a minimum basis for political equality; it facilitates inclusion in the sense that each citizen's vote is counted (Dahl, 1964). In practice, the features and incentives of the electoral process can undermine substantive inclusion and, thus, substantive political equality. On the surface, a consociational system would seem well placed to promote political equality at the input stage of decision-making; after all, a key goal of consociation is to facilitate the inclusion of rival ethnic groups (McEvoy, 2006; McGarry and O'Leary, 2009). The term 'power-sharing' is often preceded by the word 'inclusive' to emphasise this quality (Mitchell and Evans, 2009: 147). However, the prefix does not hold up to empirical scrutiny.

In the first instance, for elections to deliver substantive political equality, all citizens must participate. If citizens abstain from voting, they abstain from providing a formal input into the democratic process that follows. No democracy records a turnout level of 100 percent, but some of the features of consociational democracies may have a particularly adverse effect on voter participation compared to other types of political system. This is highly problematic. As Lijphart (1997) himself argues, unequal participation undermines the political equality of representation. In the five most recent elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly (between 2003 and 2017), registered voter turnout averaged 61 percent; a full ten percentage points lower than the corresponding average across European parliamentary democracies (see Figure 3.1).[28] This is similar to the average level of turnout reported across the previous five

[28] It is reasonable to compare turnout levels for the (devolved) Northern Ireland Assembly with those for national legislatures on the basis that Northern Ireland's party system is largely detached from that of the rest of the United Kingdom. As such, elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly typically have

legislative elections in other consociational systems. For Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lebanon, Macedonia, Northern Ireland and Switzerland, the average turnout is 62 percent. Belgium is, of course, an outlier. Its much higher average level of turnout (90 percent) is, to a significant extent, a function of compulsory voting (see Jackman, 1987; Miller and Dassonneville, 2016).

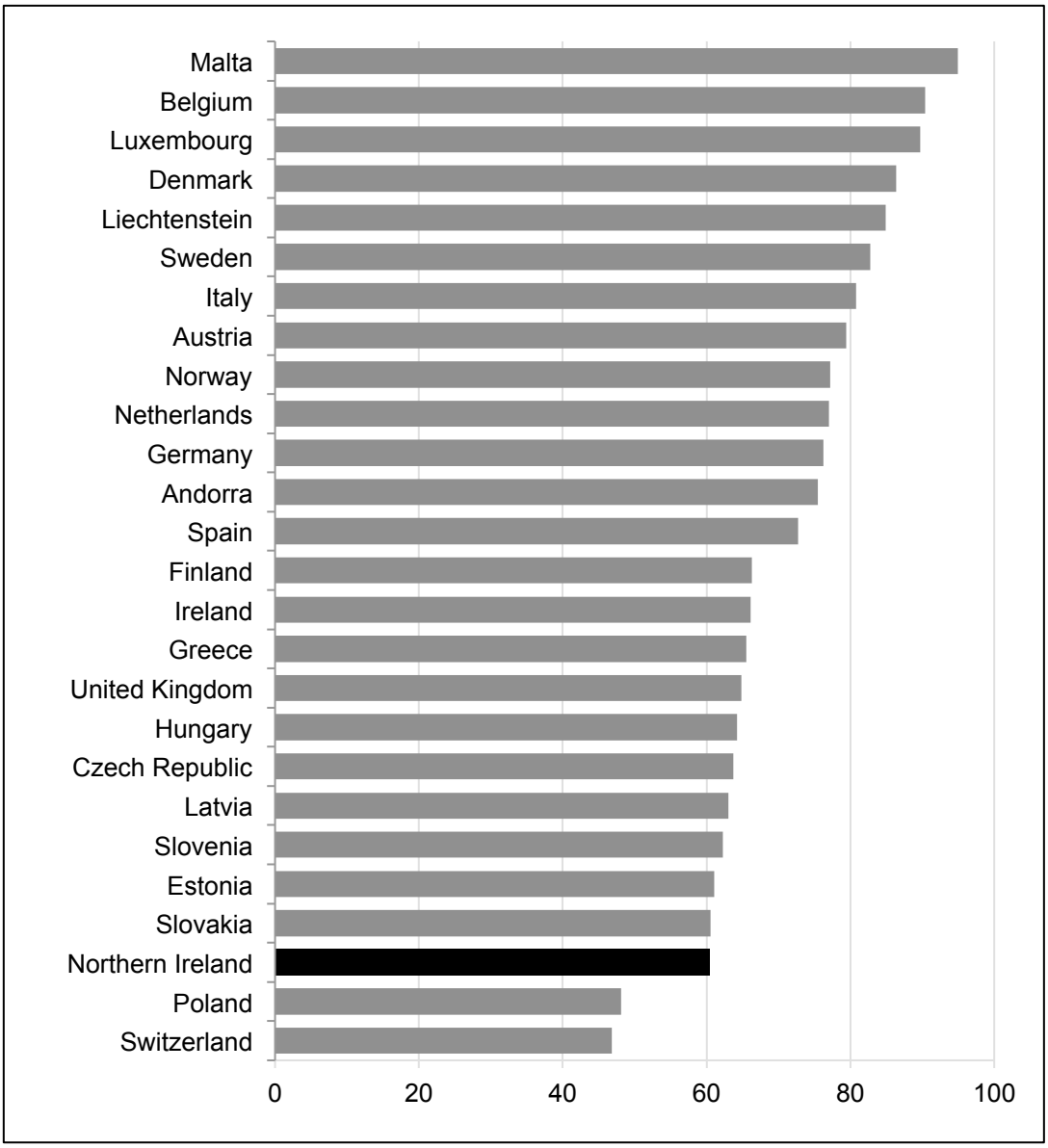

Figure 3.1: *Mean voter turnout (percentage of registered voters) in European parliamentary democracies over the last five legislative elections (up to 2017)*

a 'first-order' quality, sharing more in common with European elections at the national-level than at the regional-level (see Reif and Schmitt, 1980).

In the absence of compulsory voting, consociational systems offer relatively weak institutional incentives for voters to participate in elections. The logic is intuitive: if a nominally inclusive power-sharing government is the pre-determined result of an election, citizens themselves may not feel empowered to determine which parties are included and excluded from government (see Downs, 1957: 156; Geys, 2006: 651). Instead, politics may be regarded as a largely elite affair.[29]

A low level of voter turnout is not in itself a cause for concern; indeed, abstention from voting may be a tacit expression of broad satisfaction with decision-makers. However, there is little accompanying evidence to suggest that citizens in Northern Ireland are satisfied with the performance of political elites. In 2007, the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey reported higher levels of satisfaction than dissatisfaction.[30] Yet in every subsequent year that it has been measured, net satisfaction has been negative. In 2014, the most recent year in which they were asked, 11 percent of respondents said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the performance of MLAs, compared to 66 percent who reported being either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Figure 3.2 illustrates the relative volatility and intensity of (dis)satisfaction levels in Northern Ireland against a European context.[31]

[29] Asked whether they think the Assembly gives ordinary people more say in how Northern Ireland is governed, two-thirds say it makes no difference, compared to 17 percent who say it gives them more say (Ark, 2014).

[30] The precise question wording was, "Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way Northern Ireland MLAs are doing their job?" Responses were measured on a five-point scale. Figure 3.2 presents the difference between the percentage of respondents expressing one of two measures of satisfaction and the percentage expressing one of two measures of dissatisfaction.

[31] Data are taken from the European Social Survey item, "Now thinking about the [country] government, how satisfied are you with the way it is doing its job?" (ESS, 2017). As with the scale for the Northern Ireland item, net satisfaction at each time point is the percentage of satisfied minus dissatisfied responses. The average at each time point is taken across the 16 countries for which data is available (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom). It is unfortunate that the performance satisfaction items from the European Social Survey and Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey target different objects: the government versus politicians generally. However, more than 90 percent of MLAs in Northern Ireland were in a party of government throughout the period, blurring much distinction between government and politicians in general. In the absence of a more direct comparison, Figure 3.2 depicts the most relevant trends of available data.

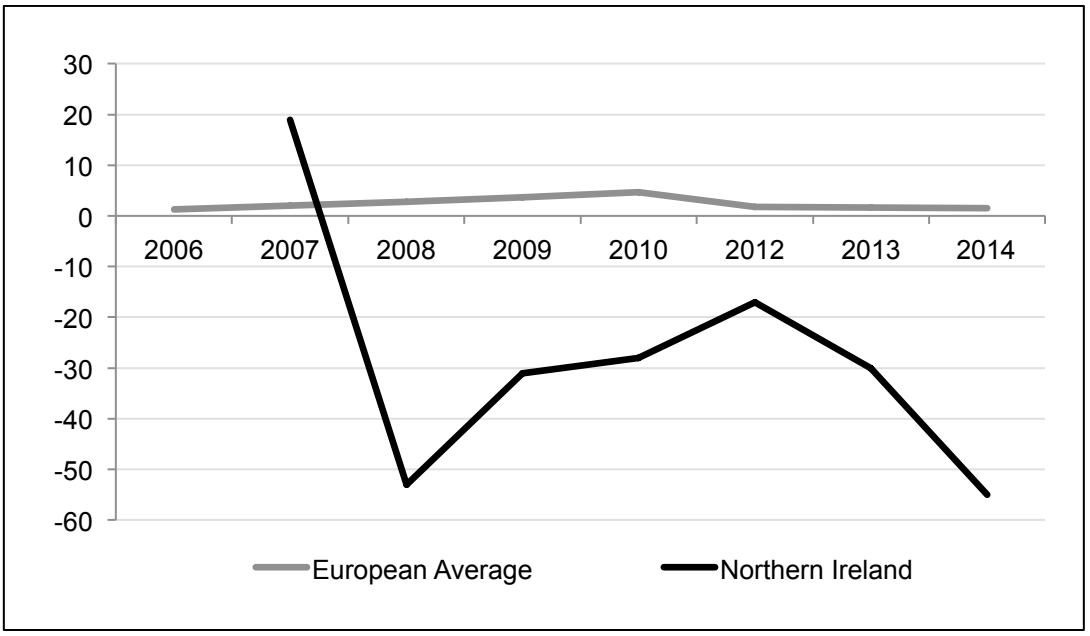

Figure 3.2: *Net levels of satisfaction with the performance of MLAs in Northern Ireland compared to average net levels of satisfaction with the performance of European governments (Sources: ESS 2006-2014; NILTS 2007-2014)*

In a deeply divided place, high levels of abstention could also signify a shallowing of traditional cleavages. If voting tends to be driven by ethnic factors, the act of non-voting may imply a reduction in the salience of these factors. In Northern Ireland there does indeed appear to be a sizeable ethno-nationally 'moderate' cleavage emerging. However, if inclusive power-sharing is about "the accommodation of ethnic diversity" (Wolff, 2009: 120), Northern Ireland's institutions and party system systematically fail to represent diversity *outside* the main ethno-national groups. Wilson (2009: 228) criticises an institutional "blindness to social trends below elite politics." The Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey of 2017 found that while 53 percent of respondents identified as either nationalist or unionist, 45 percent identified as neither (Ark, 2017). Figure 3.3 places these figures in context: the prevalence of individuals identifying as neither in this cross-sectional survey was not an anomaly, but rather part of an established trend.

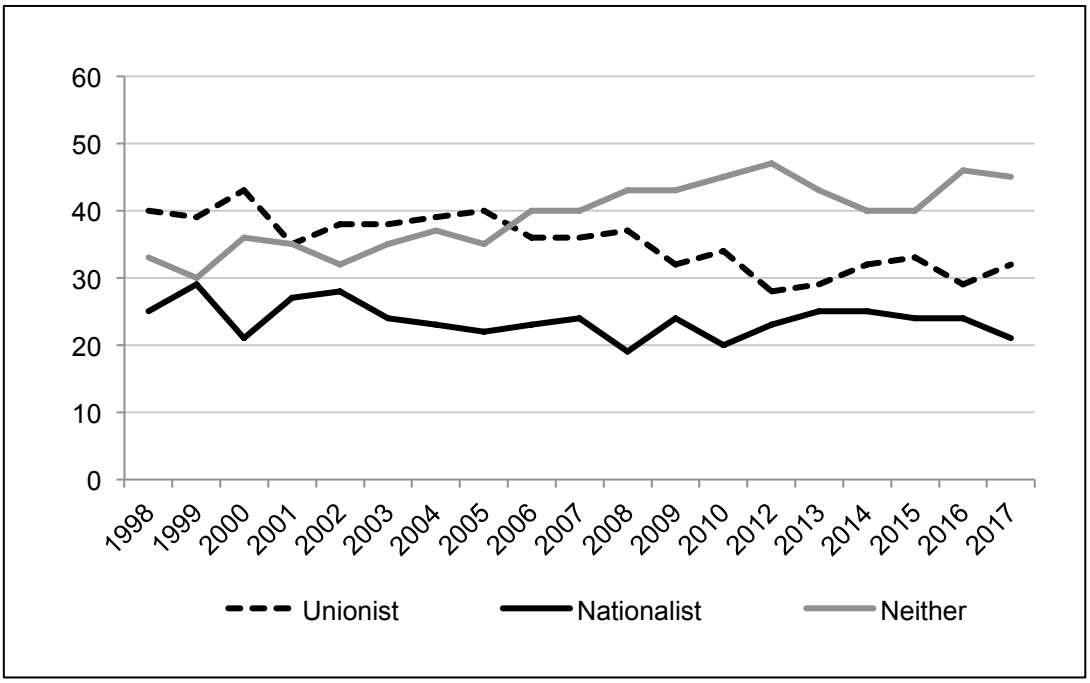

Figure 3.3: *Ethno-national ideology over time (percentage self-identifying as unionist, nationalist or neither; Source: NILTS 1998-2017)*

In contrast, the number of MLAs designating as either nationalist or unionist has never fallen below 90 percent in the Assembly, privileging representation on the ethno-national ideological dimension over other potentially salient dimensions.

Thus, we observe two obstacles to political equality. First, the emphasis on elite power-sharing appears to foster a sense of detachment between representatives and the represented. This perceived gap between elites and citizens may be narrower in consociational systems containing mass parties with extensive capabilities and acquiescent followers (Nordlinger, 1972). These conditions are not met in Northern Ireland, where political elites have "failed to integrate civic society … into the existing governance arrangements" (Birrell and Gormley-Heenan, 2015: 125). Therefore, many citizens in Northern Ireland may feel little sense of inclusion in the selection of decision-makers at the input stage of the system, especially those with little attachment with any of the main political parties.

Second, and related, the electoral mechanism appears inadequate to facilitate the representation of Northern Ireland's emerging ethno-nationally moderate cleavage. A proportional electoral system would seem conducive to inclusion, but the electoral incentives are for existing (ethno-national) parties to polarise (Wolff, 2005). Political parties tend to be rewarded for divisiveness, not moderation, leaving elections characterised by centrifugal intra-communal competition, as opposed to possible centripetal inter-communal competition (Cox, 1990; Horowitz, 2014).

Ethnic 'out-bidding' by rival parties is not inevitable in a consociational system. Political parties within each bloc are capable of adopting pragmatic positions on a range of policy areas without sacrificing electoral success (Mitchell *et al.* 2009), but the space for ethnic 'under-bidding' is typically limited (Coakley, 2009). Indeed, even ethno-nationally moderate voters engage in "compensational voting" in anticipation of post-election bargaining: "voters will want to be represented by their 'strongest voice'" (Mitchell and Evans, 2009: 152). While McEvoy and O'Leary (2013) note that voters are perfectly free to support ethnically moderate, centrist political parties if they wish to do so, this statement of fact neglects the reality that it is often difficult for new parties to emerge. Party systems are not necessarily 'frozen', but existing parties play a large agenda-setting role and help to constrain any prospective new entries (Sartori, 1969; Mair, 1997). In other words, a lack of supply may not necessarily reflect a lack of demand. In the meantime, those who feel distant from existing (ethno-national) political parties are significantly less likely to vote (Garry, 2016b).

Therefore, the process of selecting decision-makers in Northern Ireland's consociational system may be perceived as politically unequal: it appears elite-centric rather than citizen-centric, and systematically under-represents citizens who

lack a strong ethno-national identity. These challenges of inclusion suggest that the electoral process is unable, at least on its own, to promote a broad perception of legitimacy at the input stage of the political system.

3.1.2 The Challenge of Promoting Deliberation

How are decisions made in a consociational political system? For Fishkin (1991), a democratic decision-making process should be, to a large degree, deliberative. In most representative democracies, however, there is a critical obstacle that often undermines the quality of deliberation preceding legislative and executive decisions: partisanship. Ferejohn contends that meaningful deliberation in an elected legislature is only optional in the sense that, "if you have the votes you do not need reasons too" (Ferejohn, 2008: 206). The partisan nature of most legislatures means that many members, particularly backbenchers, become lobby fodder. The logic of legislative party discipline results in members lacking the incentives to persuade each other or be persuaded, at least in a plenary session; instead, they have far greater incentives to serve their party's interests, rather than to promote common interests (Mayhew, 1974; Kam, 2009).

Political parties can, of course, accommodate deliberation within their internal structures to varying degrees. But the reality is that what the public observes in the legislative arena is not amenable to a high quality of meaningful deliberation. Mucciaroni and Quirk (2006: 203-204) detect little evidence that members of the United States Congress engage in genuine attempts at persuasion, with much to suggest that congressional discourse is shaped by ideology and partisanship. Similarly, applying their Discourse Quality Index (DQI) to a cross-national study of

parliamentary debates, Bächtiger *et al.* (2005) found almost no effect of deliberation on substantive outcomes.[32]

On the surface, the cross-party, cross-community basis of government in Northern Ireland would seem more conducive to deliberation. If rival political elites must share power, would they not be forced to set aside partisan – and ethno-national ideological affiliations – in order to serve the common interest? Political leaders might be incentivised to find common ground in order to preserve the system (Lijphart, 1977). In practice, however, consociational institutions offer a very different incentive: strategic bargaining (Steiner, 2012), with potentially destabilising consequences for the political system. Deliberation necessarily requires actors to reflect on a wide range of arguments and information, and to be open to changing their preferences accordingly; this lies in tension with bargaining on behalf of particularistic interests (Dryzek, 2000). In contrast to deliberation, bargaining is about the resolution of disputes through "negotiation (rather) than through persuasion" (Goodin, 2003: 76). In Northern Ireland, elite bargaining is a familiar process to citizens. The Good Friday Agreement is itself the product of intense negotiation (Mitchell, 2001; Hennessey, 2009). During subsequent episodes of crisis or instability, cross-party talks have become the default recourse.[33]

The primacy of bargaining over deliberation has two main effects on the decision-making process. First, the goals of decision-making are defined with an emphasis on group interests and values (Finlay, 2011; Rosler, 2016). Having already discussed the ethno-national nature of elections, Cash (2009) argues that adversarial politics (within and between ethno-national blocs) is a rational prerequisite for group

[32] See Quirk *et al.* (2018) for an overview of the literature on legislative deliberation, including a discussion on measurement challenges.
[33] The St Andrews Agreement (NIO, 2006), the Hillsborough Castle Agreement (NIO, 2010), Stormont House Agreement (NIO, 2014) and the Stormont (Fresh Start) Agreement (NIO, 2015) are all examples of elites negotiating cross-party deals in order to stabilise Northern Ireland's institutions.

representatives to exercise legitimate power in a power-sharing administration. Steiner (2009: 196) acknowledges the tension between elite bargaining and substantive deliberation around broader interests; he argues that a "spirit of accommodation" is missing from power-sharing in Northern Ireland, whereby political arguments are often expressed without reference to the common good. Hayward (2014) contends that there is popular demand for deliberative processes to help address Northern Ireland's deep divisions and complex, common problems, but that the explicit dualism between nationalism and unionism institutionalises group interests to be in perpetual competition with one another. Wilford (2015: 774) echoes her observation of consociational decision-making: "the [Northern Ireland] Assembly … is for the most part a congress of *ethnic* ambassadors in which communal purposes and prejudices, rather than the general good and general reason, prevail" (original emphasis). Even in committees, where the tone is sometimes less partisan and more deliberative, members essentially behave as "party animals" within each ethno-national bloc (Wilford and Wilson, 2006: 30).

A decision-making process centred on bargaining rather than deliberation makes for an unruly spectacle. Parties may be incentivised to take contradictory positions before elections (Deschouwer, 2005). After them, they lack a sense of common purpose or collective responsibility in government (Taylor, 2009). Indeed, rather than persuade one another in pursuit of a common goal, ministers have taken each other to court (Gormley-Heenan, 2015: 59). Citizens observe this absence of deliberation from political decision-making. The 2015 Life and Times Survey asked respondents, "How much would you say that members of the Northern Ireland Assembly from different parties work together to help solve Northern Ireland's problems?" Twenty-nine percent of respondents said 'a fair amount' or 'a great

deal', while 65 percent who said 'not very much' or 'not at all' (Ark, 2015). This represents an increase in the number of negative responses compared to the 2001 survey (the only other year in which this item was measured).[34] Meanwhile, more people distrust than trust the Assembly to work in Northern Ireland's long-term interests.[35] The defence of narrow party goals over the pursuit of common interests has the potential to result in an incoherent and/or dysfunctional government; survey evidence suggests that citizens notice, largely to their frustration.

Second, the emphasis on bargaining over deliberation limits the role of evidence in policy-making. Knox (2008: 355) examines the recent reform of public administration in Northern Ireland, providing an illustration that "political commitments often lead you in directions that the evidence does not necessarily strongly support." Again, this is not necessarily unique to consociations, but a compounding feature of power-sharing is the considerable scope of individual ministers to make their own decisions. Bell and Stockdale (2016) note the tension between highly localised pressures and broader interests over the decision not to pursue a national park in the Mourne Mountains. Since it was not necessary to bring the decision before the full Executive, the Environment Minister was arguably under greater pressure to prioritise localised interests over considerations of the wider interests of Northern Ireland's citizens. Furthermore, critics argue that the devolved nature of consociational government gives ministers the opportunity to simply maintain policy parity with legislation passed centrally at Westminster, particularly over social security (Birrell and Heenan, 2010). The lack of imagination, or will, to develop bespoke policies tailored to Northern Ireland's interests harks back to

[34] Forty-three percent say 'a fair amount' or 'a great deal'; 50 percent say 'not very much' or 'not at all' (Ark, 2001).
[35] Thirty-two percent say they trust the Assembly to work in Northern Ireland's long-term interests 'all of the time' or 'most of the time', while 60 percent say they trust it to do so 'only some of the time' or 'almost never' (Ark, 2015).

practice of ‘Shamrock photocopying’, whereby (before devolution) Whitehall departments in London would simply duplicate policies in Great Britain and apply them to Northern Ireland (Cairney *et al.* 2009).

Against a backdrop of inter-group bargaining and a limited role for evidence-based policy-making, the decision-making process lacks a meaningful degree of reflective deliberation. In particular, the tension between bargaining and deliberation raises the question of what consociation is intended to deliver. If Northern Ireland’s political system is to facilitate a meaningful form of post-conflict democracy and reconciliation, the procedural design of the political process should encourage decision-making around the common good rather than the defence of the rival interests of ‘constituent peoples’ (Wilson, 2009: 236). For Taylor, consociationalists do not grasp the post-conflict ‘sociological terrain’. He argues that only “a turn to deliberative democratic politics” is required to promote a truly “public-spirited attitude” in policy-making (Taylor, 2009: 327). However, it is unnecessary to choose between the two approaches: O’Flynn (2006; 2010) does not call for consociational arrangements to be abandoned, but rather advocates the explicit promotion of deliberative principles within consociations. In any case, if citizens themselves *want* to see a more post-conflict style of policy-making, their expectations are unlikely to be met by a political system without such principles in evidence. Less partisanship and greater deliberative capacity will be required to strengthen the perceived legitimacy of decision-making.

3.1.3 The Challenge of Promoting Non-Tyranny

After decision-makers have had the opportunity to consider different policy options, how are decisions formally *taken* in a consociational political system? As Fishkin (2009) notes, decisions taken by otherwise democratic means can still result in discriminatory outcomes. This is where the principle of non-tyranny is important: avoiding "the choice of a policy that imposes severe deprivations of essential interests *when an alternative policy could have been chosen* that would not have imposed comparable severe deprivations on anyone" (Fishkin, 2009: 62; emphasis added). Consociation, by conscious design, requires a set of procedures to avoid any 'tyranny of the majority'. Representatives of Northern Ireland's two main ethno-national blocs, nationalists and unionists, possess an effective veto on any bill or motion perceived to discriminate against their group's essential interests.[36] Warren (1999) argues that the general problem underlying any political relationships is a lack of trust; in the post-conflict context of Northern Ireland, mutual vetoes are designed to offer groups protection in the absence of sufficient levels of inter-group trust. However, McCulloch (2014) notes that permissive veto rights for minorities can lead to systemic abuse and, in turn, precipitate routine decision-taking deadlock.

From the democratic principle of non-tyranny, this raises a crucial, counter-intuitive point. Fishkin (2009: 62) argues that tyranny may arise from the "conscious choice of policy *omission* as well as commission." In other words, it is not just a majority that can impose tyranny, but a minority can also inflict tyranny. Procedural mechanisms with a relatively low veto threshold "invite gridlock" (Oberschall and Palmer, 2005: 82). Schwartz (2014) notes the highly challenging operationalisation

[36] The old Parliament of Northern Ireland (1921-1972) was strongly associated with unionist majority rule. For its entire history of half-a-century, the Ulster Unionist Party held a majority of seats. The post-1998 consociational arrangements represent a conspicuous institutional effort to avoid any future possibility of one group, represented by one or more parties, dominating another.

of mutual vetoes for Northern Ireland's two communities. While a 'petition of concern' may be legitimately tabled for issues relating to culture, conflict legacy, and institutional reform, the precise conditions under which this mechanism may be applied are not specified. With an open-ended scope, a petition of concern may be "used to block decisions which have nothing to do with community specific interests" (Schwartz, 2014: 4). It is not just a feature of politics in Northern Ireland; gridlock is also common in consociational Belgium (Deschouwer, 2005). Where there is stalemate at the elite level, McGarry and O'Leary (2009: 35) acknowledge that it leads to "instability" in the political system. This threatens public support.

It would be a mischaracterisation of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Executive to suggest that they operated in a state of permanent gridlock, yielding no substantive output responsive to citizens' demands. In terms of the volume of legislation passed between 2007 and 2014, Schwartz (2014) calculates that the Assembly output was not significantly lower to that of the Scottish Parliament (where no comparable veto procedure exists).[37] However, the *quality* of output has not necessarily been meaningful. Birrell and Gormley-Heenan (2015: 74) acknowledge a "steady flow of primary legislation" from the Assembly (see Figure 3.4), but classify most of it as relatively unimportant or parity legislation (rubber-stamping UK-wide policies).

Business does not necessarily grind to a halt; high decision thresholds result in patchy output and can vastly narrow the scope of the policy agenda. Decisions often reflect a lowest-common denominator approach. In an empirical audit of democratic performance in Northern Ireland, Nolan and Wilson (2017) argue that the devolved institutions have failed to deliver a single piece of *consequential* legislative

[37] Between 2007 and 2014, the Northern Ireland Assembly passed 86 acts, only 15 fewer than the Scottish Parliament (Schwartz, 2014: 3).

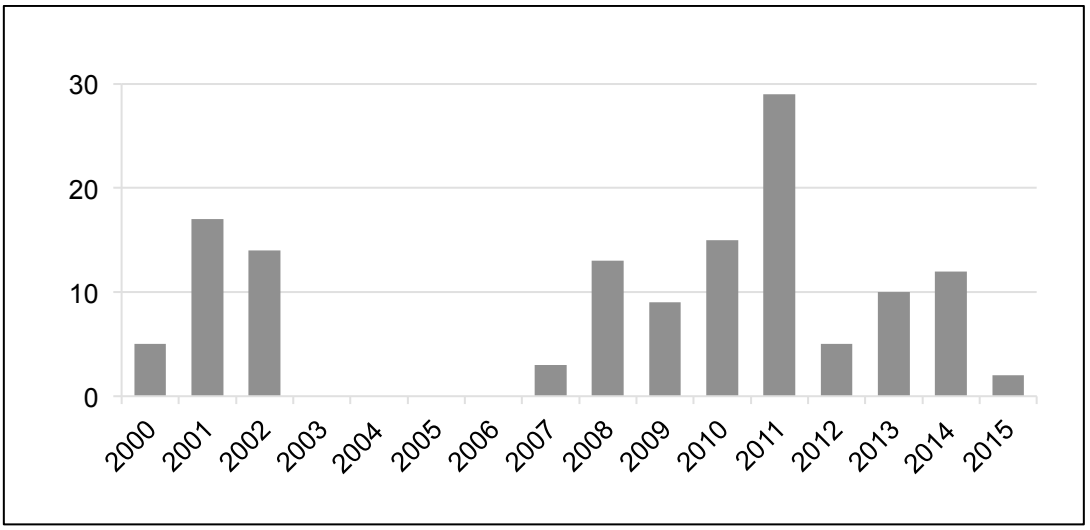

Figure 3.4: *Number of bills passed by the Northern Ireland Assembly, 2000-2015 (adapted from Birrell and Gormley-Heenan, 2015: 76)*

output. With little procedural incentives to do otherwise, the foci of many political representatives remains on constitutional debates and short-term issues (Wilson, 2005). This comes at the expense of longer-term public service issues and social policy (Knox, 2015: 30). Knox (2016: 501) succinctly captures the policy effects of 'tyranny of the minority':

> Somewhat ironically, the political structures put in place in Northern Ireland to ensure a consensus … actually make it more difficult to respond effectively to public expectations for better services and an improved quality of life.

In a study of empirical indicators on educational attainment, crime, welfare claims, unemployment, mental health, physical health, and crime, Knox (2016) finds evidence of a decreasing quality of life in Northern Ireland's most deprived communities, typically those suffering the worst effects of conflict. For Wilford (2009: 181), the failure to tackle these issues stems from the rigid framework of governance: "policy deficits are the price of a confected, inclusionary consociation."

According to survey data, citizens appear underwhelmed by the work of the institutions. Only 11 percent of citizens say that the Assembly has achieved 'a lot', 48 percent say that it has achieved 'a little', while 31 percent say that it has achieved 'nothing at all' (Ark, 2015).[38] The weak perceptions of achievement may lead people to question the instrumental value of democratic institutions. Only a minority of citizens (20 percent) perceive the Assembly to be value for money. Of the two-thirds of respondents who do not perceive it to be value for money, more than half say it 'definitely is not' (Ark, 2015).[39] If citizens do not perceive a decision-making process to meet their substantive policy expectations, they may question the value of the process itself.

Therefore, while Northern Ireland's consociational procedures for taking decisions were designed in response to low levels of inter-group trust – in particular, the traditional minority (Catholic-nationalist) group's concern at the prospect of tyranny by the traditional majority (Protestant-unionist) group – in practice they may facilitate systematic discrimination through policy omission: non-decisions. The salience of the ethno-national dimension and the ability of unionist and nationalist party representatives to exercise a veto make for a potentially gridlocked decision-taking process. Not only are difficult decisions avoided altogether, but the rules are "specifically unfair" to representatives designating as neither nationalist nor unionist – and the voters they represent – since they do not have the same capacity to impose or override a veto (Schwartz, 2010: 357). We have already seen from attitudinal data that a plurality of citizens identify as neither nationalist nor unionist; these citizens do not enjoy the same procedural protections or rights as those with a stronger ethno-

[38] Respondents were asked, "Overall, do you think that the Northern Ireland Assembly has achieved … [a lot/a little/nothing at all]?"
[39] Perceptions of instrumental value were measured on a four-point scale by this item: "On balance, do you think that the Northern Ireland Assembly is good value for money for people in Northern Ireland?"

national ideological position. The laudable intention of institutionalising procedures to help protect minorities from discrimination cannot be dismissed, but there is a difference between tyrannical decisions and decisions that, while instrumentally undesirable for some, are far from tyrannical. As Wilson (2005) notes, consociationalism and non-majoritarianism are not the same thing; similarly, group vetoes may not be the only mechanism through which non-tyranny can be promoted in the context of weak inter-group trust. Indeed, if a population in a *post-conflict* context cannot be easily reduced to two groups, new ways of taking decisions should be considered if the process is to receive a broad perception of legitimacy.

3.1.4 Preliminary Hypotheses

Having examined the performance of Northern Ireland's consociational political system, there are compelling grounds to suspect that it falls short of many citizens' expectations. Table 3.1 summarises the argument.

	Stage of Political System		
	Input ➔	**Throughput** ➔	**Output**
General process feature	Selection of decision-makers	Decision-making	Public policy decisions
Consociational process feature	Proportional representation	Elite bargaining	Mutual vetoes
Expected democratic principle	Political equality	Deliberation	Non-tyranny
Main problem for perceived legitimacy	Exclusion of non-voters and moderates?	Too much partisanship?	Gridlock?

Table 3.1: *Democratic principles and the challenges of meeting them, at different stages of a consociational political system*

Applying the framework developed in Chapter Two, Table 3.1 outlines main ways in which the system struggles to promote the principles of political equality, deliberation and non-tyranny. Accordingly, we formulate three initial hypotheses on the likely factors driving a cumulative democratic deficit.

At the input stage of the political system, we have seen that the selection of decision-makers leaves many citizens' preferences excluded from the process. Such exclusion may be voluntary, such as by abstaining from voting in elections, or it may arise from the systematic under-representation of ideological preferences that lack salience in a party system dominated by the ethno-national dimension. The challenge of delivering substantive political equality leads to the first hypothesis:

H1: *Individuals who are under-represented by the political system will be particularly dissatisfied with how democracy works in Northern Ireland.*

Second, at the throughput stage of the system, the decision-making process is characterised by a high degree of partisanship, serving sectional interests. This stands in tension with promoting the democratic principle of deliberation. While its relative absence may not be particularly problematic for people who have a strong connection to a political party, decision-making without sufficient deliberation is likely to be perceived as less legitimate by those without such a connection:

H2: *Individuals with low levels of partisanship will be particularly dissatisfied with how democracy works in Northern Ireland.*

Third, at the output stage of the political system, procedural gridlock may result in many decisions not being taken at all. Drawing on Fishkin's contention that policy

omission can result in tyrannical outcomes, mechanisms designed to protect groups' essential interests in the absence of mutual trust may have perverse consequences, undermining the ability of the political system to function effectively. Frustration with group vetoes is likely to be particularly acute among citizens from the majority group, as well as those who trust the out-group. These individuals have the least to gain from minority veto mechanisms, and so are likely to perceive less need for them:

H3: *Members of the majority group and people who trust the out-group will be particularly dissatisfied with how democracy works in Northern Ireland.*

Before examining reforms that could enhance the perceived legitimacy of decision-making, it is sensible to first confirm whether or not citizens perceive a problem to exist. If the goal is to increase levels of satisfaction with the system's democratic performance, we must understand the magnitude and nature of dissatisfaction.

3.2 Preliminary Study

3.2.1 Data & Method

Face-to-face interviews were conducted on a representative sample of the Northern Ireland population in October 2015. The 1,015 respondents were recruited by quota sampling; the composition of the final sample closely mirrors the demographic distributions reported in the 2011 Census.[40] Post-stratification weights are applied in the analysis that follows to account for the under-representation of single household

[40] Forty-eight percent of respondents were male, 52 percent female. In terms of community background, 42 percent of respondents were Catholic and 46 percent Protestant (compared to 40 percent and 42 percent respectively in the 2011 Census for Northern Ireland).

occupants. The survey asked respondents about their attitudes towards democracy and different ways of making decisions in Northern Ireland.[41] While the latter aspect of the survey is treated fully in the next chapter, the goal of this brief analysis is to provide a preliminary overview of the former.

Here, the dependent variable is *dissatisfaction with democracy*, measured with a simple item: "On the whole how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Northern Ireland?" Responses were collected on a four-point unipolar scale, which were subsequently recoded into binary categories: satisfied and dissatisfied.[42] The explanatory variables are grouped within our threefold framework of core democratic principles. To test the first hypothesis on the relationship between democratic dissatisfaction and the delivery of political equality at the selection stage of the system, we capture representational inclusion and exclusion through binary measures of electoral participation (reported voting versus non-voting) and ethno-national ideology (unionist or nationalist versus neither unionist nor nationalist).[43] For the second hypothesis on decision-making, we gauge partisanship through individuals' stated level of party attachment (feeling close to at least one political party versus feeling distant from all) and their level of trust in political parties (on a five-point unipolar scale).[44] Finally, for the promotion or otherwise of non-tyranny in the taking of decisions, we are interested in group-based attitudes. This entails

[41] See *Appendix A* for the full survey questionnaire.
[42] Response categories were "very satisfied," "fairly satisfied," "not very satisfied" and "not at all satisfied." For analytic efficiency the first two categories are collapsed into 'satisfied'; the latter two are collapsed into 'dissatisfied'.
[43] Electoral participation is measured by respondents' stated intention in a future general election. A relatively low proportion (23 percent) say they "would not vote," implying that the remainder would participate in the next election. This is likely to be an under-estimation of non-voting, since respondents tend to over-report voting in questionnaires that rely on self-reporting (Silver *et al.* 1986).
[44] On a bipolar five-point scale, respondents were asked to indicate how close or distant they felt to each of Northern Ireland's five main political parties: the DUP, Sinn Féin, the UUP, the SDLP and Alliance. Most (82 percent) felt close or neutral to at least one party, while the remaining 18 percent of respondents felt distant from all five parties. Trust in political parties is measured on a unipolar five-point scale, ranging from "do not trust at all" (1) to "trust a lot" (5). Responses are recoded into three categories: low trust (1 or 2), medium trust (3), and high trust (4 or 5).

identifying a respondent's community background (Catholic or Protestant) and their level of trust in the out-group.[45] A series of standard demographic control questions are included: age, gender and social class. The full questionnaire can be found in *Appendix A*, with descriptive statistics presented in *Appendix B*.

For context, data were collected when Northern Ireland's devolved institutions were still functioning, with an election to the Assembly scheduled for the following year. The two largest parties, namely the DUP (the largest unionist party) and Sinn Féin (the largest nationalist party), had been publicly divided on a number of issues, ranging from addressing the legacy of Northern Ireland's conflict to the implementation of welfare reform (Matthews and Pow, 2017). While they remained in a power-sharing administration together, their governing relationship had become increasingly marked by turbulence and animosity, necessitating routine cross-party negotiations to avoid the outright collapse of the political system. This backdrop will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

3.2.2 Results

A cross-sectional snapshot reveals an overwhelmingly negative picture on the perceived performance of democracy in Northern Ireland (see Figure 3.5). Just one percent of respondents said they were very satisfied with the way democracy works – statistically negligible. A larger proportion, one quarter of respondents, said they were fairly satisfied. However, a clear majority evaluated democratic performance in negative terms: 62 percent of respondents said they were not satisfied, including 31 percent who were not at all satisfied. Excluding the 14 percent of respondents

[45] All respondents were asked, in general, the extent to which they trust members of the Catholic/nationalist community and members of the Protestant/unionist community on separate five-point scales. High scores (4 or 5) on both scales indicate a high level of trust in both groups.

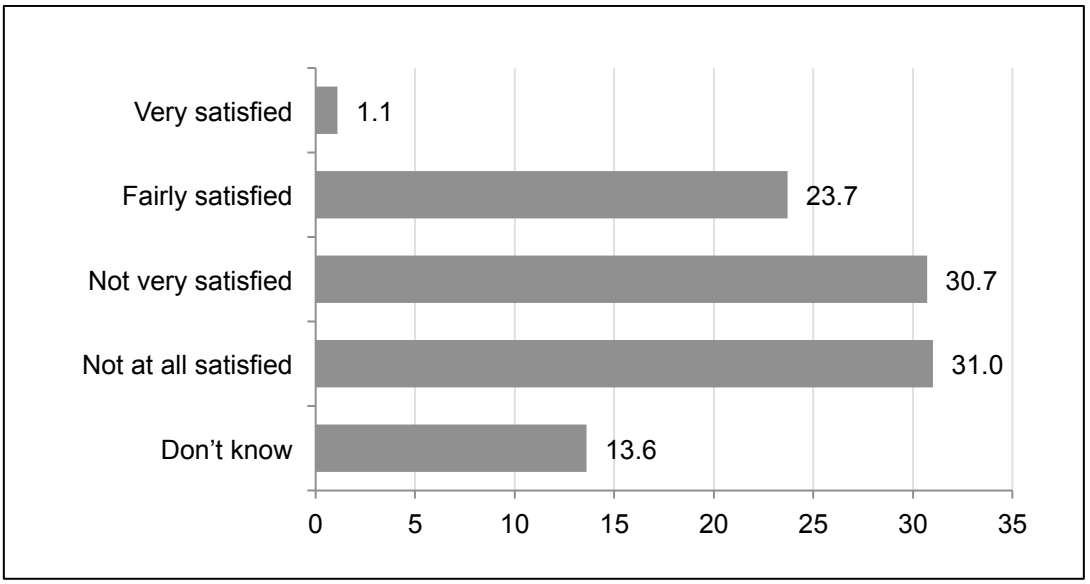

Figure 3.5: *Satisfaction with the way democracy works in Northern Ireland (% selecting each option)*

expressing a 'don't know' response, dissatisfaction levels rise to 71 percent expressing some degree of dissatisfaction compared to just 29 percent expressing satisfaction. The distribution of responses not only indicates net dissatisfaction with democratic performance (of 43 percent), but also that the intensity of dissatisfaction is significantly higher than the intensity of satisfaction. As a basic starting point, this evidence confirms that a democratic deficit exists from the perspective of citizens.

The first hypothesis expects that individuals who are under-represented by the political system are especially likely to be dissatisfied with the way democracy works in Northern Ireland. Bivariate analysis in Figure 3.6 suggests that this is not the case. A higher percentage of voters (72 percent) said they were dissatisfied with democratic performance than non-voters (65 percent), but the difference is not statistically significant (χ^2 (1, N = 773) = .84, p = .36). In other words, the chi-square test fails to support the alternative hypothesis that non-voting is a symptom of tacit endorsement of the performance of the political system. Both voters and non-voters are largely dissatisfied with the state of democracy.

Similarly, despite the observation that many individuals' political preferences are systematically under-represented by the political system in Northern Ireland, negative evaluations of the quality of democracy are not significantly higher among ethno-national centrists. Survey respondents who identify as neither nationalist nor unionist were just as likely to be dissatisfied as those who describe themselves as nationalist or unionist (χ^2 (1, N = 843) = .20, p = .66). Across the ideological spectrum, seven out of ten evaluated the performance of the system in negative terms.[46] In other words, the individuals we would expect to feel under-represented by decision-makers in Northern Ireland's consociational system, at least on the salient ethno-national dimension, are just as likely to be dissatisfied with the way democracy works as the individuals we would expect to feel well represented.

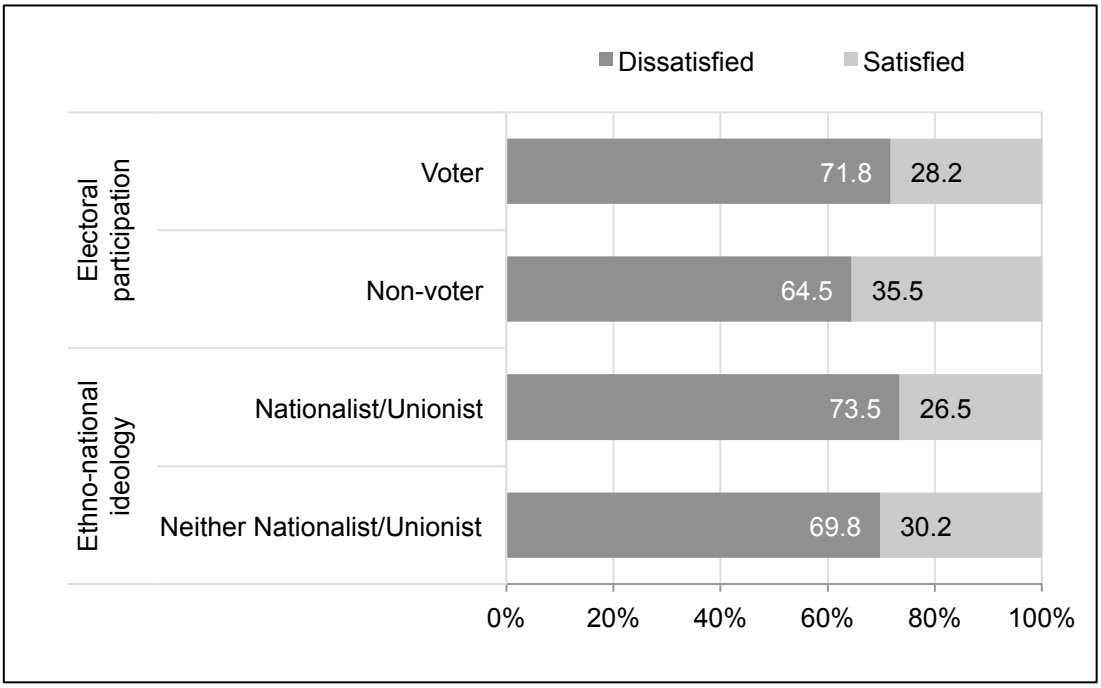

Figure 3.6: *Satisfaction with the way democracy works in Northern Ireland, by groups over- and under-represented in the political system*

[46] Within the broad 'nationalist/unionist' category, 74 percent of unionists and 73 percent of nationalists said they were dissatisfied with the way democracy works, indicating no significant differences in evaluations at either end of the ethno-national ideological spectrum.

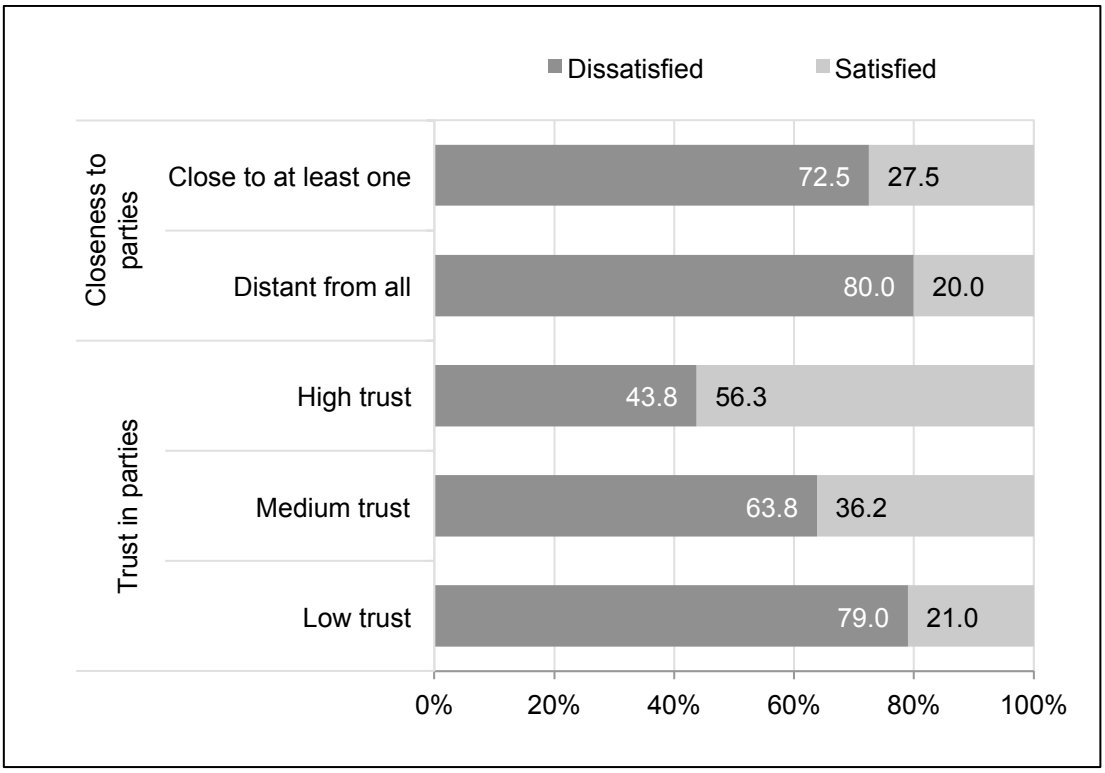

Figure 3.7: *Satisfaction with the way democracy works in Northern Ireland, by measures of partisanship*

The second of our preliminary hypotheses expects that individuals with low levels of partisanship will be particularly dissatisfied with the way democracy works in Northern Ireland. The bivariate relationships presented in Figure 3.7 suggest that this is indeed the case. The first measure of partisanship is derived from an individual's perceived closeness to political parties. Over 70 percent of those who are close to at least one political party evaluated democracy in negative terms, compared to 80 percent of those who do not feel close to any political party. This difference is moderately significant (χ^2 (1, N = 710) = 3.60, p = .06). We see an even stronger relationship with the second measure of partisanship, the extent to which individuals trust political parties in general. Among those reporting a high level of trust in political parties, a majority said they were *satisfied* with the way democracy works; only around two in five said they were dissatisfied, compared to four in five among

those who report a low level of trust in political parties (χ^2 (2, N = 819) = 51.37, $p < .01$).

The third expectation is that individuals with little to gain from minority veto mechanisms are especially likely to be dissatisfied with the performance of democracy in Northern Ireland. The findings presented in Figure 3.8 challenge this hypothesis. Levels of dissatisfaction are high among members of both the Protestant and Catholic communities; the differences in the way members of the traditional majority and minority groups evaluated democratic performance are not statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level (χ^2 (1, N = 776) = 3.09, p = .08). Moreover, people who trust members of the out-group are actually *less* dissatisfied with democracy than people who are less trusting of the other by ten percentage points. This difference is statistically significant (χ^2 (1, N = 714) = 9.02, $p < .01$).

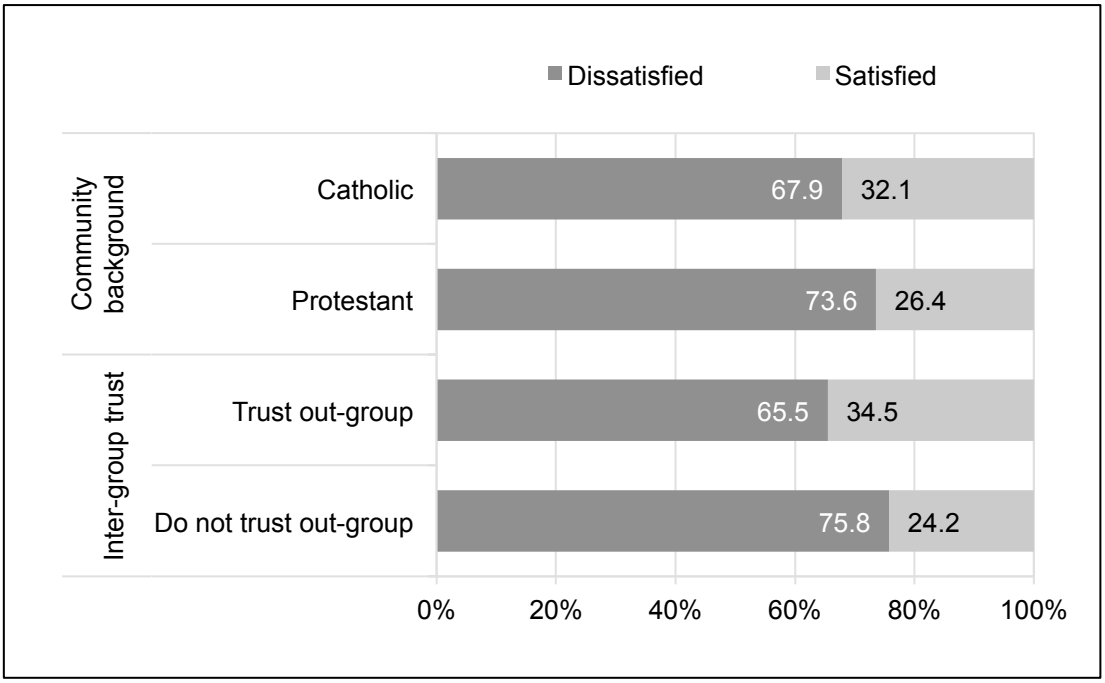

Figure 3.8: *Satisfaction with the way democracy works in Northern Ireland, by measures of group identity and inter-group trust*

	1	2	3	4
	Dissatisfaction with Democracy			
Selection				
Non-voter (ref: voter)	.894 (.203)	-	-	1.239 (.338)
Ethno-national moderation (high = more moderate)	.912 (.126)	-	-	.802 (.171)
Decision-Making				
Distant from all parties (ref: close to at least one party)	-	1.201 (.240)	-	.995 (.316)
Trust in parties (high = more trusting)	-	**.637** **(.085)***	-	**.620** **(.101)***
Decision-Taking				
Protestant (ref: Catholic)	-	-	1.209 (.169)	1.040 (.220)
Trust out-group (ref: do not trust out-group)	-	-	**.587** **(.169)***	**.552** **(.217)***
Controls				
Age	1.007 (.005)	1.002 (.005)	**1.009** **(.005)***	1.000 (.006)
Female (ref: male)	**.716** **(.165)****	**.691** **(.186)****	**.677** **(.169)****	**.539** **(.216)****
ABC1 (ref: C2DE)	1.286 (.166)	1.207 (.187)	1.263 (.171)	1.177 (.218)
Constant	**2.367** **(.396)****	**7.141** **(.377)*****	**2.127** **(.290)****	**18.448** **(.618)*****
N	741	660	715	499
-2 Log likelihood	886.358	714.295	835.537	534.979
Nagelkerke R^2	0.02	0.09	0.04	0.12
χ^2 (d.f.)	11.96 (5)**	40.01 (5)***	22.08 (5)***	43.24 (9)***

Entries are odds ratios from logistic regressions; standard errors are reported in parentheses. The dependent variable is dissatisfaction with democracy (coded '1' if true, '0' otherwise). Odds ratios greater than 1 indicate a positive association; odds ratios less than 1 indicate a negative association.

*$p < .10$; **$p < .05$; ***$p < .01$

Table 3.2: *Modelling dissatisfaction with democracy*

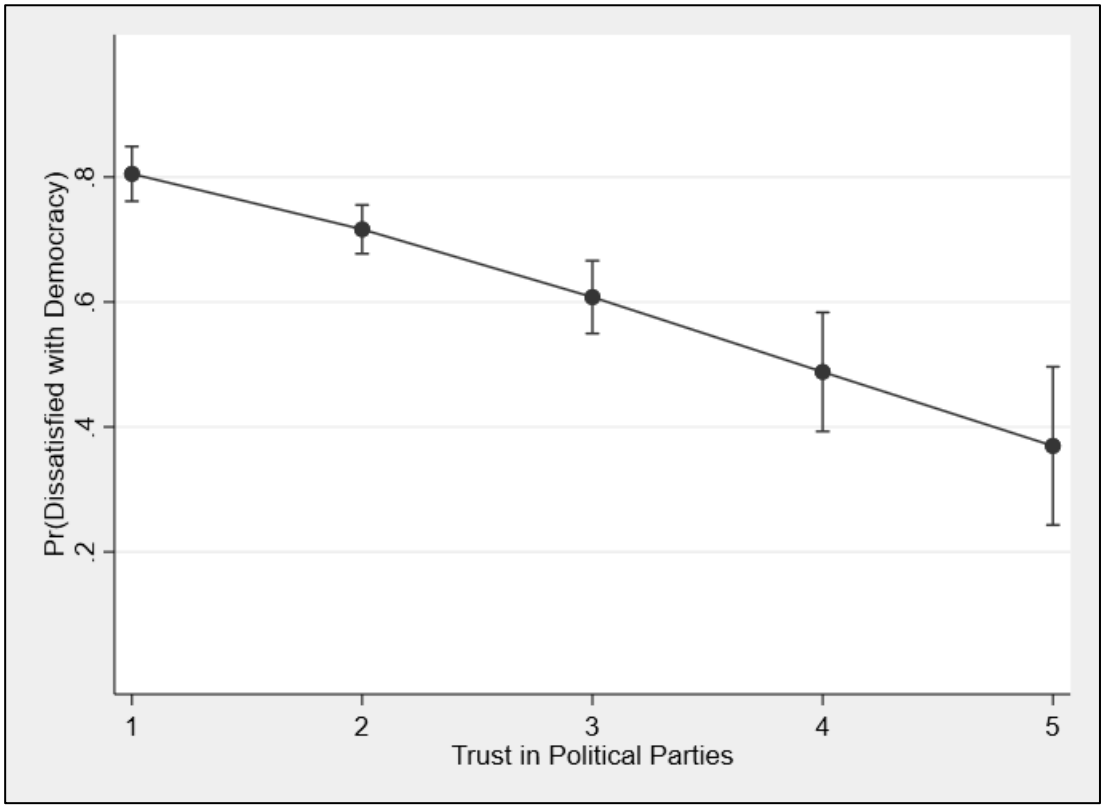

Figure 3.9: *Marginal effect of level of trust in political parties on being dissatisfied with democracy*

Table 3.2 combines each of the variables explored so far in a series of multivariate logistic models estimating democratic dissatisfaction. Controlling for age, gender and social class, the nature and direction of the prior bivariate relationships are unchanged. The only exception is the effect of party attachment: all else equal, being distant from all political parties is no longer a significant predictor of being dissatisfied with democracy. Instead, individuals' lack of trust in political parties appears to provide a much stronger explanation. Holding all other variables constant at the mean, Figure 3.9 depicts the marginal effect of different levels of trust on the probability of being dissatisfied with the way democracy works in Northern Ireland (estimated from Model 4 in Table 3.2). The trend is unequivocal. The lowest level of trust in political parties (1) is associated with an 81 percent probability of being

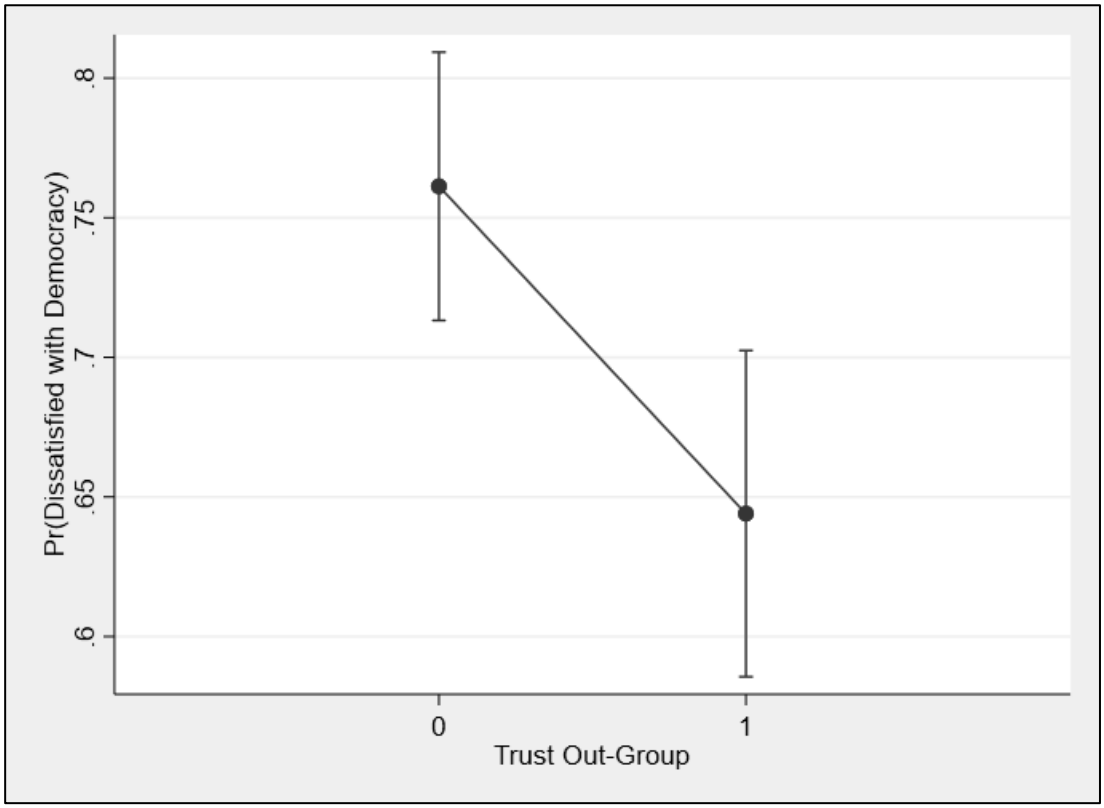

Figure 3.10: *Marginal effect of out-group trust on being dissatisfied with democracy*

dissatisfied with the way democracy works. At the other end of the scale, the probability of an individual being dissatisfied with the way democracy works is more than halved if he or she holds the highest level of trust in political parties (5). It is worth revisiting the distribution of attitudes towards political parties to begin with: only 2 percent of respondents said they trust them "a lot" (scoring 5); 46 percent said they do not trust them "at all" (scoring 1). In other words, levels of trust in political parties are heavily skewed to the negative, and these views are highly associated with being dissatisfied with the political system's democratic performance.

In comparison, the marginal effect of trusting the out-group is not as large: both those who are trusting and less trusting of members of the out-group are more likely than not to be dissatisfied with the way democracy works (see Figure 3.10). The probability of being dissatisfied decreases from 76 percent to just under 65

percent across the two levels of out-group trust. Therefore, compared to differential levels of trust in members of the out-group, differential levels of trust in political parties provide a much sharper contrast in accounting for the probability of certain individuals being satisfied rather than dissatisfied with the way democracy works in Northern Ireland.

3.3 Discussion & Conclusion

This preliminary study shows that people in Northern Ireland are highly dissatisfied with the democratic performance of its consociational political system. From the perspective of citizens themselves, it is difficult to dispute that a democratic deficit exists. A more challenging task lies in disentangling the precise factors driving it.

At the input stage of the political system, Northern Ireland's consociational arrangements are designed to promote the inclusion of both unionists and nationalists in decision-making. In reality, however, we see that the preferences of ethno-national centrists are disproportionately *excluded* from political representation. High levels of voter abstention further undermine the ability of the system to promote political equality. Non-voters and individuals who are neither nationalist nor unionist are indeed more likely to be dissatisfied than satisfied with the way democracy works. However, they are no more likely to hold negative evaluations of the system compared to voters and individuals who hold demarcated ethno-national positions.

If people who are systematically over-represented are just as likely to be dissatisfied with democratic performance as people who are systematically under-represented, does this mean that substantive political equality is irrelevant when it comes to citizens' perceptions of the political system? The attitudinal evidence does

not necessarily support this interpretation. It is, in fact, possible for over- and under-represented groups to perceive political inequalities in representation, but to object to it for different reasons. For example, it is possible that unionists and nationalists are frustrated with democratic performance precisely because *rival* ideological views are included so prominently in political representation, even if their own views are also over-represented as a result of the selection process. In contrast, individuals who hold a centrist position on the ethno-national dimension are likely to be frustrated because *their own* views are under-represented; they stand to gain the most from selection mechanisms that promote more politically equal outcomes.

Similarly, even though people who abstain from voting are no more likely to be dissatisfied with democratic performance than people who participate in elections, it would be mistaken to conclude that perceptions of substantive political equality play no role in shaping people's evaluations of the system. In the first instance, it is important to note that despite the rejection of the first hypothesis, the results did not offer support for the alternative hypothesis. To put it another way, non-voting is not significantly associated with being more *satisfied* with democratic performance, making it difficult to see how electoral abstention signifies tacit contentment with the system. Non-voters and voters are equally *dissatisfied* with the system's democratic performance. From this perspective, the real puzzle is not that non-voters are not more dissatisfied, but rather that voters are not more satisfied. It is possible that high levels of dissatisfaction among non-voters are indeed largely explained by their sense of exclusion from the system – a perception of political inequality. For voters, meanwhile, their substantive inclusion may be insufficient to offset other perceived deficiencies of the way the system works. For them, it is not a sense of political inequality in the selection of decision-makers that is driving dissatisfaction;

it is more likely that voters' negative evaluations arise from their observations of the subsequent stages of decision-making.

At the throughput stage of the system, political parties are traditionally the primary vehicles through which voters' preferences are translated into policy outcomes. In Northern Ireland, the nature of decision-making is particularly partisan, characterised by negotiation over fixed, narrow interests rather than deliberation in pursuit of a common interest. It appears that people notice, and they evaluate the system accordingly. Such a decision-making process is marginally less problematic for people who feel close to at least one political party, and much less problematic for those who generally trust political parties. It appears that for the latter group especially, political parties remain effective agents in democratic decision-making.

However, levels of dissatisfaction with the way democracy works are significantly higher among people who do not feel close to any political party and those who distrust parties in general. When the two variables are included in a model together, it is clear that distrust in political parties is a particularly powerful predictor of democratic dissatisfaction. Given that less than 10 percent of people trust political parties in Northern Ireland, compared to two-thirds who distrust them, it would be decidedly unrealistic to expect political parties to be the sole vehicles capable of meeting citizens' democratic expectations for the system. As long as distrust in political parties is so widespread and so heavily associated with the underlying problem, they are much more likely to be *contributing* to a democratic deficit than *fixing* it. There are, therefore, compelling grounds to suggest that a very different model of decision-making is required in response. A much greater emphasis on deliberation over partisanship in decision-making could, at the very least, help to close the gap.

Finally, at the output stage of the political system, a low veto threshold helps to make gridlock a frequent phenomenon in Northern Ireland. While minority veto mechanisms were designed to avoid tyranny of the majority, non-decision-making can result in perverse outcomes. Intriguingly, Catholics and Protestants are equally likely to be dissatisfied with Northern Ireland's democratic performance. While the traditional majority group may be expected to be particularly frustrated with a system characterised by gridlock, it seems that the minority group shares this level of frustration. Moreover, while we may reasonably have expected that people who trust members of the out-group to have been especially dissatisfied with the political system, since they derive no benefit from group-based protections, it turns out that individuals who are *less* trusting of the out-group are significantly more likely to be dissatisfied with the way democracy works. In other words, the very people who the system is explicitly designed to protect are the ones who are the least likely to be satisfied with its performance.

And yet perhaps this should be unsurprising. If, as it is argued, the legitimacy of the political system is undermined by continual abuse of veto powers by political representatives of *both* communities, their mutual manipulation of consociational procedures may paradoxically serve to undermine, not generate, inter-group trust. Still, if the political system were to abandon these mechanisms entirely, people who distrust members of the out-group may not respond positively once they reflect on the potential loss of power for their own group. Without experiencing any direct gain from group veto rights, individuals who are trusting of the out-group are more likely to welcome a process of taking decisions that promotes non-tyranny in a broader sense, beyond minorities alone.

In sum, this chapter has offered a preliminary, yet striking, diagnosis: Northern Ireland's political system suffers from a pervasive democratic deficit. From the perspective of the maxi-public, it appears that considerable legitimacy has already vented from the system. Though being a deeply divided place, many citizens are united in their view that their political system is not functioning as it should be. Controlling the problem will be a daunting task, and it is unlikely that any remedy will be able to close the democratic deficit quickly or in isolation. On the contrary, enhancing citizens' evaluations of the decision-making process is likely to take time and concerted reforms to the way the system operates.

The diagnosis provides a starting point for developing at least one targeted solution. Recognising the challenges of delivering the democratic principles of political equality, deliberation and non-tyranny in a consociational political system, the preliminary empirical evidence suggests that, to varying degrees of magnitude and certitude, these challenges cumulatively contribute to a democratic deficit in Northern Ireland. Crucially, if these principles can be more effectively promoted by adding new elements to the decision-making process, some of the causes of the democratic deficit can be brought under control. While no single solution is likely to be capable of addressing all sources of grievance, the immediate priority should be to weigh up the possible solutions that stand a realistic chance of addressing the shortcomings identified. In the previous chapter, it was argued that citizens' assemblies could be established alongside existing institutions to help perform this corrective role. In the next chapter, we proceed to empirically investigate this claim by assessing the extent to which such mini-publics are regarded as a legitimate by the maxi-public.

Chapter Four

INITIAL PERCEPTIONS OF MINI-PUBLICS

THE PERCEIVED LEGITIMACY OF CITIZENS' ASSEMBLIES COMPARED TO OTHER MODES OF DECISION-MAKING

> *Apollo 13*: Okay Houston, are you still reading 13?
>
> *Mission Control*: That's affirmative. We're still reading you. We're still trying to come up with some good ideas here for you.
>
> Radio communication between Apollo 13 Lunar Command Pilot Fred Haise and Mission Control, 13 April 1970 (NASA, 1970: 161-2)

Equipped with an initial diagnosis of the problem, the next step is to establish if the proposed treatment, a citizens' assembly, is likely to be effective. The effectiveness of any prescribed solution rests on two assessments. First, does the treatment directly target the symptoms giving rise to the diagnosis? This might seem like an obvious question, but its purpose is to differentiate between certain courses of action that might be worthy in their own right, regardless of their relationship to the underlying problem, and those courses of action that are demonstrably associated with an improvement in specific symptoms. From a purely normative perspective, the application of deliberative democracy is a worthy pursuit for a variety of compelling

reasons. But having diagnosed a democratic deficit on the basis of empirically observed symptoms, an effective intervention must be evaluated on its capacity to treat them. Participants and organisers of a citizens' assembly might find the process to be resoundingly positive on a personal level, but what contribution, if any, can these democratic innovations make more broadly at the level of the political system?

This brings us to a second question. How does one particular treatment compare to the available alternatives? To try and fix a democratic malaise, the temptation may be to either fall back on dusty off-the-shelf remedies that no longer work, or else to blindly embrace a fashionable new institutional innovation without any prior intention of testing its likely effectiveness. Either approach may yield disappointing results if the potential contribution of a prescribed treatment is not evaluated against other plausible options, including the status quo. If deliberative mini-publics are to help control a democratic deficit in a political system, we first need to determine their potential *relative* to other possible ways of making decisions.

Thus, the goal of this chapter is to establish citizens' baseline perceptions of mini-public legitimacy compared to other – more conventional – modes of decision-making. First, it considers the range of options that may be considered as a realistic response to political crisis in the context of Northern Ireland. Second, it uses cross-sectional survey data to assess the basic potential for citizens' assemblies to promote the principles of political equality, deliberation and non-tyranny, before directly comparing the perceived merits of citizens' assemblies to alternative processes. This is a baseline test of their perceived legitimacy. Third, it subjects each mode of decision-making to a more robust test of legitimacy through a randomised survey experiment, moving beyond citizens' evaluations to assessing the extent to which they would accept a decision with which they disagree, reached by different means.

4.1 Never Waste a Good Crisis

4.1.1 Contextualising Crises & Strategies for Intervention

Having been introduced to Northern Ireland's consociational political system in Chapter Three, it will come as little surprise that it routinely finds itself in crisis. The disproportionate representation of ethno-national ideologies, the heavily partisan nature of decision-making, and a low veto threshold combine to undermine the stability of the political system. It has been argued that these chronic symptoms amount to an underlying democratic deficit. Sometimes they go largely ignored in the background, apparently benign, but at certain junctures their malignancy is brought to the fore. An acute crisis delivers an existential shock to an already fragile system, further undermining public support and threatening its very survival.

The resilience of Northern Ireland's power-sharing institutions has been repeatedly tested since their establishment in 1998. Early controversies included the initial failure of the IRA to decommission its weapons, resulting in the boycott of Executive meetings by one of the parties of government (the Democratic Unionist Party) and a series of short suspensions of the institutions by the UK government during 2000 and 2001 (Tonge, 2000; Hazleton, 2004). Allegations of an intelligence-gathering operation by the IRA at Stormont, the seat of government, brought about a more durable suspension of the institutions in 2002. The fact that it took five years for them to be restored underscores the inherent difficulty associated with the task of political reconstruction, along with the risk that any temporary collapse of the system becomes permanent.

After the reinstatement of the devolved institutions in 2007, the Assembly and Executive managed to complete a full term for the first time. This period was characterised by a relative sense of calm. The devolution of policing and justice

powers to Stormont in 2010 was a defining moment, having been reserved by the UK government at Westminster until Northern Ireland's political parties could agree to the handover of such a sensitive portfolio.[47] Despite evidence of dysfunction, such as a number of Executive ministers voting against their government's own budget in early 2011, and despite ongoing security threats, not least a number of deadly attacks carried out by dissident republicans, these challenges did not appear to pose a more fundamental danger to the consolidation of Northern Ireland's devolved institutions and peace process. As Matthews (2012: 349) notes, the 2011 Assembly election campaign largely focused on 'bread and butter' issues rather than the "constitutional pyrotechnics" that dominated most previous contests. However, it would be "premature" to take this relative shift in tone as a deeper sign of 'normalisation' (*ibid*: 344).

Thereafter, things went downhill. The 2012 decision by Belfast City Council to fly the Union Flag from City Hall only on designated days, rather than all-year-round, sparked widespread street protests (Nolan, 2013; Jarman, 2019). Relations between the main parties of the Executive came under greater strain as the relative salience of the ethno-national dimension increased at the expense of 'bread and butter' issues. Intense disagreement over the flying of flags was accompanied by renewed disputes over the regulation of parades and dealing with the bitter legacy of Northern Ireland's recent conflict (Lawther, 2014; Bryan, 2015; Evans and Tonge, 2017). The "heavy political turbulence" generated by these three issues was compounded by contestation over the implementation of welfare reform, whether or not same-sex couples should have the right to marry, and whether or not Northern Ireland's abortion laws should be liberalised (Matthews and Pow, 2017: 311). New

[47] In the Hillsborough Castle Agreement (NIO, 2010), Northern Ireland's five main political parties agreed that the cross-community Alliance Party would nominate the new Justice Minister. See Brewer (1991) on the contested nature of policing in divided societies.

disputes along socio-economic ideological dimensions tend to reinforce, rather than undercut, ethno-nationalism (Garry *et al.* 2017).

Matters reached a tipping point in January 2017 when the deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness, resigned from the Executive over the alleged mishandling of a renewable energy scheme by the First Minister, Arlene Foster.[48] His party, Sinn Féin, did not nominate a successor, thus collapsing the power-sharing government. A resulting Assembly election failed to fundamentally alter the arithmetic of government formation – the Democratic Unionist Party, led by Mrs Foster, was returned as the largest party in the Assembly – but the campaign served to expose bitter animosity between the two main parties. In the wake of the election, there have been five separate rounds of inter-party negotiations to try and re-establish the Executive. Despite the crisis ostensibly stemming from the failure of the First Minister to take accountability for a policy failure, another issue swiftly replaced it as the main point of contention between the main parties: Irish language rights. At the time of writing, they have been unable to resolve their differences.[49]

Table 4.1 summarises Northern Ireland's post-Agreement experience of devolved government. The purpose of this chronological synopsis is to emphasise the inherent instability of Northern Ireland's devolved political system, even when functioning. While the early crises stemmed directly from the tangible legacy of ethno-national conflict, the system's underlying democratic deficit arguably weakens its capacity to withstand them. This magnifies the need for a democratic intervention that resolves a crisis in a sustainable way, and that helps prevent any recurrence.

[48] In her prior capacity as Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Mrs Foster had implemented a scheme intended to encourage non-residential premises to generate heat from renewable energy. In late 2016 it became apparent that this Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) was running severely over-budget, having been implemented without appropriate cost controls. A public inquiry into the matter is underway, chaired by Sir Patrick Coghlin.

[49] Despite the dormancy of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive, the UK government has not formally suspended the devolved institutions.

Status	Year	Events
	1998	***Good Friday Agreement*** *signed (April); first Assembly election held (June). Assembly meets for the first time (July); operates in 'shadow' capacity.*
	1999	*Full powers devolved to the Assembly from Westminster (December).*
	2000	*Assembly suspended (11 February-30 May); powers returned to Westminster.*
	2001	*24-hour suspensions of the Assembly (on 10 August, 22 September).*
	2002	*Assembly suspended (from October); direct rule from Westminster ensues.*
	2003	*Assembly election held (November), but institutions remained suspended.*
	2004	*Inter-party talks to restore devolved Assembly break down at Leeds Castle (September).*
	2005	
	2006	***St Andrews Agreement*** *reached after inter-party talks (November)*
	2007	*Devolved powers restored to Stormont (May) after Assembly election (March)*
	2008	
	2009	
	2010	*Inter-party talks to devolve policing & justice powers results in the* ***Hillsborough Castle Agreement*** *(February)*
	2011	*Assembly election held (May)*
	2012	*Loyalist street protests over flag display (December).*
	2013	*Inter-party talks, chaired by Richard Haass and Meghan O'Sullivan, begin in September, but conclude without agreement (December).*
	2014	***Stormont House Agreement*** *reached after 11 weeks of inter-party talks chaired by the UK government (December)*
	2015	***Fresh Start Agreement*** *reached after 10 weeks of inter-party talks chaired by the UK government (November)*
	2016	*Assembly election held (May); UK referendum on EU membership (June).*
	2017	*Assembly collapses, but is not formally suspended. Election held (March). Four rounds of inter-party talks fail to produce a new government.*
	2018	*Fifth round of post-election inter-party talks collapse (February).*

Table 4.1: *A timeline of key moments in the functioning of Northern Ireland's devolved political system, 1998-2018*

Key: Functioning Partly functioning Not functioning

To date, there have been two broad approaches to crisis intervention. In the first instance, there may be an attempt to *persevere* with the system in its basic form. Indeed, this is the default course of action, as the pattern in Table 4.1 denotes. Emergency cross-party negotiations are convened to try and resolve the parties' differences. These elite-level talks are usually chaired by the UK government or an international diplomat; they take place behind closed doors and usually take months to produce a result, if at all.[50] A fresh election could be called in an attempt to persevere with the system by establishing fresh mandates. However, if political parties are divided before an election, they are unlikely to face pressure to compromise during a campaign or in its immediate aftermath – as illustrated by the March 2017 Assembly election.[51]

A very different approach would be to *abandon* the system altogether, either for a fixed period or indefinitely.[52] This would involve direct rule from Westminster, likely with official input from the Irish government. Such an arrangement may provide a period of breathing space, but it is not a realistic option for the long-term. All major political parties in Great Britain – and in the Republic of Ireland – insist that Northern Ireland should have a devolved government, consistent with the Good Friday Agreement, and thus view direct rule in any form as an option of last resort.[53]

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[50] Multi-party talks convened by American diplomat Richard Haass, for example, lasted from September to December 2013 but failed to result in a multi-party agreement on the issues of flags, parading and dealing with the legacy of the past. Other talks between political elites have been more successful, resulting in the Hillsborough Agreement (NIO, 2010), the Stormont House Agreement (NIO, 2014) and the Fresh Start Agreement (NIO, 2015).

[51] As Table 4.1 notes, to date there have been five separate rounds of cross-party talks to try and form a government in the wake of the March 2017 election. None have been successful.

[52] Abandoning the system could, of course, be a pretext for some sort of reformed devolved system of government for Northern Ireland. The possibility of institutional reform is one that may emerge from any of these approaches, but it is a deeper question: it is not a short-term response to political crisis.

[53] The UK government has been notably reluctant to impose direct rule following the most recent collapse of Northern Ireland's power-sharing institutions in 2017. In the absence of ministerial direction and oversight, civil servants have been running government departments on a provisional basis. While Westminster approved legislation to ensure the continued funding of public services, any major public policy decisions have either been avoided or reversed following judicial review (Erwin, 2018).

A third (and untested) approach would be to *supplement* the existing system with another kind of democratic decision-making, complementing an elite-centric process with a formal role for citizens. If elected politicians are locked in a vicious circle of deepening tumult, why not empower citizens themselves to adjudicate on the specific issue(s) causing the crisis? Holding a referendum would be the most familiar way of enhancing representative institutions with direct democracy (Budge, 1996). Such an option could be decisive, but it could also be divisive, particularly in an already deeply divided place where a referendum may be seen as an overly crude majoritarian instrument (McGarry and O'Leary, 2009). As we have seen in Chapter Two, deliberative democracy offers an alternative mode of citizen-based decision-making. It offers the same benefit of direct democracy – involving citizens directly in the political process – but with an emphasis on supplying citizens with an environment conducive to *considered* decision-making. After reviewing the applications of deliberative democracy to deeply divided places, O'Flynn and Caluwaerts (2018: 744) are optimistic that it "promises to help," if done well.

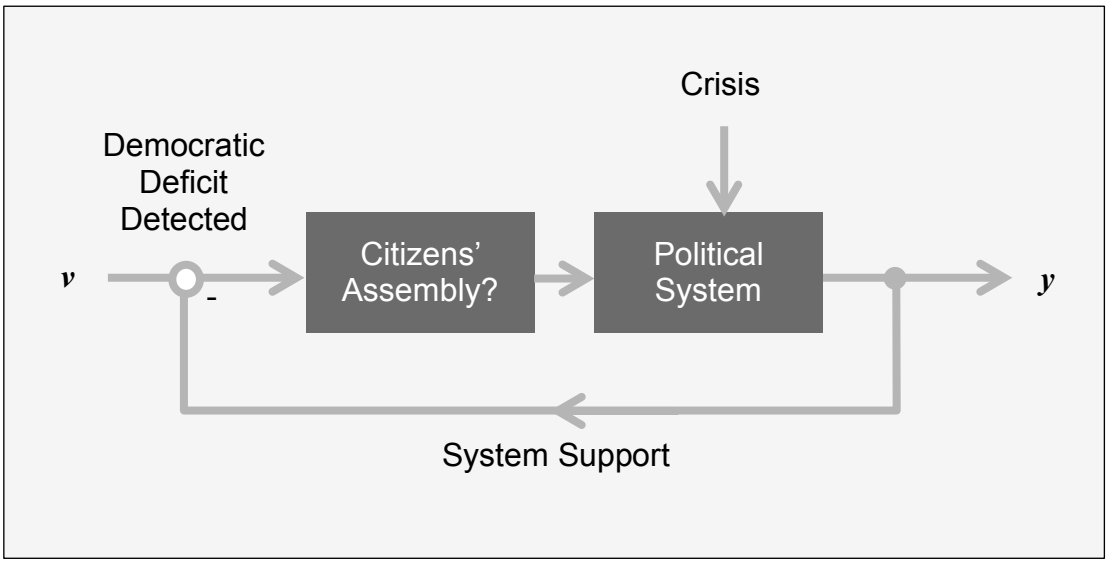

Figure 4.1: *A citizens' assembly in a control system (adapted from Leigh, 2012: 19)*

We have also seen from Chapter Two that deliberative democracy can be formally institutionalised in the form of a citizens' assembly. Figure 4.1 illustrates the basic logic of a citizens' assembly as a supplement to Northern Ireland's political system. It has two related advantages. First, it may help to make a constructive contribution to any pressing crisis among political elites (O'Flynn and Caluwaerts, 2018). That is, it may serve as an intervention aimed at resolving the immediate source of an acute, short-term crisis. Second, and more fundamentally, it may help to make a positive contribution by controlling the chronic democratic deficit underlying Northern Ireland's political system. By promoting the principles of political equality, deliberation and non-tyranny, a citizens' assembly could help improve evaluations of the broader system from the perspective of the maxi-public, repositioning the system onto a more sustainable footing. Thus, the advantage of a crisis is that by shining a light directly on the nature of existing arrangements, it provides an opportunity to experiment with innovative democratic reforms that may otherwise be seen as unnecessary. From the perspective of the maxi-public, a political crisis may also stimulate a greater willingness among citizens to take such proposals seriously.

4.1.2 Hypotheses

What do people think about citizens' assemblies? Do they hold broadly favourable or broadly unfavourable attitudes to their key institutional features? At the individual-level, we expect that certain types of citizen will respond more enthusiastically to this innovative mode of decision-making than others. Drawing on both the theoretical framework presented in Chapter Two and the empirical analysis of Chapter Three, the specific attributes of citizens' assemblies are likely to be

	Stage of Political System		
	Input ➔	**Throughput** ➔	**Output**
General process feature	Selection of decision-makers	Decision-making	Public policy decisions
Consociational process feature	Proportional representation	Elite bargaining	Mutual vetoes
Expected democratic principle	Political equality	Deliberation	Non-tyranny
Main problem for perceived legitimacy	Exclusion of moderates?	Too much partisanship?	Gridlock?
Citizens' assembly value added	Inclusion of moderates	Emphasis on deliberation	Collective decision

Table 4.2: *Democratic principles, and the challenges of meeting them, at different stages of a consociational political system*

particularly attractive to citizens who are less well served by the features of a consociational political system. Table 4.2 summarises the value added by citizens' assemblies across the three stages of decision-making, prompting the following initial hypotheses on the factors shaping positive perceptions toward some of their basic procedural features:

H1a: *Support for the selection features of a citizens' assembly will be particularly high among individuals under-represented by the existing system (non-voters and people who are more ethno-nationally moderate).*

H1b: *Perceptions of the deliberative decision-making capacity of a citizens' assembly will be especially high among those with low levels of partisanship.*

H1c: *Support for a citizens' assembly playing a role in the taking of decisions will be particularly high among members of the majority group and individuals with high levels of out-group trust.*

At the aggregate-level, we need to scrutinise the baseline legitimacy of citizens' assemblies against alternative modes of decision-making. Despite the theoretical promise of citizens' assemblies to enhance the quality of democracy, their relative novelty may limit popular appreciation of their potential to make a net positive contribution to the political system. Compared to representative and direct forms of democracy, deliberative mini-publics of any kind remain unfamiliar to the broader maxi-public. A lack of prior awareness of the concept may offset the perceived benefits of citizens' assemblies relative to more conventional forms of decision-making. As such, a further hypothesis errs on the side of caution:

H2: *The perceived legitimacy of a citizens' assembly will be at least as high as that for the alternative approaches to resolving a political crisis*.

However, compared to representative modes of democratic decision-making, it is expected that citizens' assemblies will receive a higher level of support from individuals who stand to be better served by an alternative arrangement: people who are less well represented by the consociational system, those who may prefer deliberative over partisan decision-making, and those who would prefer to see decisions taken without the threat of minority veto. At this stage, compared to approaches that involve persevering with the system in its current form, it is expected that these individuals will be equally attracted to supplementing it with either direct or deliberative democracy:

H3a: *Compared to modes of decision-making that involve persevering with the system as it is, the perceived legitimacy of a citizens' assembly will be higher among individuals under-represented by the existing system, individuals with*

low levels of partisanship, and individuals from the majority group or those possessing high levels of out-group trust.

H3b: *Compared to a referendum, the perceived legitimacy of a citizens' assembly will be equally high among individuals under-represented by the existing system, individuals with low levels of partisanship, and individuals from the majority group or those possessing high levels of out-group trust.*

4.2 Study One

4.2.1 Data & Method

A representative sample of the Northern Ireland population was interviewed on their attitudes towards a hypothetical citizens' assembly as well as other (more familiar) forms of decision-making in October 2015.[54] Respondents were presented with the following stimulus:

> On some important issues – such as flag display and the issue of welfare reform – the political parties in Northern Ireland find it very hard to agree with each other, and this leads to political crises. When such a crisis happens, there may be a number of ways to try and resolve it. Please tell me to what extent you think each of the following approaches is a good idea or a bad idea.

Here, respondents are initially being asked to imagine a set of circumstances – a political crisis at the elite-level – and to evaluate potential, yet realistic, responses.

[54] This was part of the same cross-sectional survey analysed in Chapter Three. Face-to-face Computer-Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI) were conducted by Ipsos-MORI. 1,015 respondents were recruited by quota sampling. Post-survey checks suggest that the sample is representative. 48 percent of respondents were male and 52 percent female. In terms of community background, 42 percent of respondents were Catholic and 46 percent Protestant (compared to 40 percent and 42 percent respectively in the 2011 Census for Northern Ireland). In the statistical analyses that follow, the data are weighted to realign any deviation from the quotas.

For context, political parties were at the time engaged in talks chaired by the UK government, culminating in the Fresh Start Agreement (NIO, 2015) the following month. Thus, the scenario benefits from a high degree of realism. The possible responses presented to respondents correspond to the three broad approaches of *persevering* with the system in its existing form (through inter-party talks chaired either by the British government or an international diplomat, or holding a fresh election), *abandoning* the system (by introducing direct rule from Westminster), or *supplementing* the system (with a referendum or a citizens' assembly).

Our specific focus is, of course, on people's perceptions of citizens' assemblies. Compared to the five other options, this form of decision-making is relatively novel and the concept is unlikely to have been familiar to the vast majority of people in the sample. Therefore, before being asked for their reaction, respondents were first provided with a brief vignette to describe the three key features of a citizens' assembly. These included the *random selection* of ordinary citizens from the general population to serve as its members; their *deliberation* on the background information, evidence and arguments on both sides of a contentious issue; and the reaching of a *collective decision* to be implemented:

> Another possible way of resolving a difficult issue – such as flag display or the issue of welfare reform – would be to get a group of ordinary people to make a decision on it after they have had a chance to consider the evidence and arguments. Here's how it would work… A representative sample of 500 ordinary citizens in Northern Ireland is selected to consider the issue. These people would be selected in the same way that people are selected to serve on a jury: they are randomly selected. And they would be a cross-section of all of the people in Northern Ireland in terms of age, gender, social class and religious and community background. The people on this 'Citizens' Assembly' would be provided with background information about the issue

> and would be given a presentation of all the main arguments on both sides of the issue. They would be asked to think carefully about the evidence and the different views and would then be asked to vote on the issue. What a majority of these people decided in the vote would be seen as the decision on the issue and would be implemented.

The first two features are generally common to all citizens' assemblies, at least as they have been constituted in practice; the latter is more unusual in that a citizens' assembly is usually tasked with reaching an advisory decision, not a binding one. However, in order to meaningfully compare respondents' perceptions of the legitimacy of a citizens' assembly against alternative modes of decision-making, it provides a more robust test when the hypothetical body possesses equivalent (i.e. final, rather than advisory), decision powers.

There are two sets of dependent variables. The first set of single-item measures capture basic attitudes toward selection, decision-making, and decision-taking features with respect to the hypothetical citizens' assembly itself: the extent to which ordinary people would be good decision-makers,[55] their likely motives in decision-making,[56] and the extent of the role that it should play in taking decisions.[57] Further items capture the extent to which respondents think that each mode of decision-making, citizens' assemblies and the alternatives, is a good or bad idea.[58]

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[55] "*In general, how good or bad do you think ordinary people would be at making decisions if they were selected to serve on a citizens' assembly?*" There were five response categories: 'very bad', 'fairly bad', 'neither good nor bad', 'fairly good' and 'very good', with 'don't know' a further permissible option.

[56] "*In a citizens' assembly, do you think ordinary people would try to come to a decision that is good for everyone in Northern Ireland, or would they just try to look after the interests of their own community, or just try to look after their own personal interests?*" The response categories were: '…good for everyone in Northern Ireland', '…just try to look after the interests of their own community', '…just look after their own personal interests', and 'don't know'.

[57] "*If a citizens' assembly of this kind was introduced do you think it should…* ['…make the final decision', '…make a recommendation to be considered by politicians' or '…not be given any role at all in policy-making']*?*"

[58] The response categories were 'very good idea', 'good idea', 'neither good nor bad idea', 'bad idea' and 'very bad idea'. Respondents had the option of responding with 'don't know'.

These are relatively crude measures of perceived legitimacy. In isolation, none can capture the full breadth and depth of the concept. Instead, they reflect a more modest goal of establishing respondents' basic attitudes toward key institutional features of citizens' assemblies, as well as comparing people's general evaluations of citizens' assemblies against other modes of decision-making. Taken together, these measures offer an initial, not a complete, investigation of citizens' assembly legitimacy.

In order to test the individual-level hypotheses, we need variables that are relevant to the different stages of the citizens' assembly process: selection, decision-making, and taking decisions. Electoral participation relies on a self-reported item on future voting intention. Ethno-national moderation is initially measured on a five-point bipolar scale and recoded to form a three-point unipolar scale, ranging from strong to moderate levels of ethno-nationalism.[59] Trust in political parties is measured on a five-point Likert scale. Partisan detachment is operationalised as a dummy variable: those who feel distant from all political parties are coded '1' while those who feel close to at least one party are coded '0'.[60] Similarly, out-group trust is operationalised as a dummy variable: those who trust members of both traditional communities are coded '1'; those who only trust members of their own community are coded '0'.[61] Community background is itself measured according to nominal categories. Standard controls are included for age, gender and social class. All variables were also used in the survey analysis in Chapter Three. The full questionnaire can be found in *Appendix A*, with descriptive statistics in *Appendix B*.

[59] On the three-point scale, those identifying as very strongly unionist or nationalist are coded '0', those identifying as fairly strongly unionist or nationalist are coded '1', and those identifying as neither unionist nor nationalist are coded '2'.

[60] On a five-point scale respondents were asked the extent to which they felt close to or distant from each of the five main political parties (the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), Sinn Féin and the Alliance Party.

[61] Respondents were asked (on a five-point scale) the extent to which they trusted "people from a Catholic/nationalist community background" and "people from a Protestant/unionist community background." When respondents indicated one of the two positive response categories for both items, they are coded as being trusting of both communities ('1').

4.2.2 Results

Some simple descriptive statistics convey broadly favourable attitudes toward the key features of citizens' assemblies. At the input stage of a citizens' assembly, most survey respondents appear receptive to the idea of ordinary people being selected to play a role in decision-making. Fifty-six percent say they think that ordinary people would be good or very good at making decisions, while only one in six say they would be bad or very bad. As Table 4.3 illustrates, there are no significant differences in attitudes between voters and non-voters (χ^2 (2, N = 819) = 1.49, p = .48) or across different levels of ethno-national ideology (χ^2 (2, N = 884) = .74, p = .69). Just as individuals who are over-represented in Northern Ireland's political system are just as likely as those who are over-represented to be dissatisfied with the way democracy works, they are equally optimistic about the decision-making capability of their fellow citizens. Contrary to H1a, this suggests that one way in which citizens' assemblies promote political equality – providing an equal opportunity for all citizens to be included in their selection – is widely seen to be considerably more of a positive than a negative feature of their design.

	Bad	**Neither good/bad**	**Good**	*Totals*
Voter	16.7	26.3	57.0	*100.0*
Non-voter	20.2	23.6	56.2	*100.0*
Nationalist/unionist	16.1	27.7	56.3	*100.0*
Neither	18.2	26.5	55.3	*100.0*
All	**17.4**	**26.7**	**55.9**	*100.0*

Table 4.3: *Perceptions of whether ordinary people would make good or bad decision-makers (%), by groups over- and under-represented in the political system*

	Serve self interest	Serve own community	Serve everyone	*Totals*
Close to at least one party	18.9	41.3	39.9	100.0
Distant from all	15.7	40.5	43.8	100.0
High trust in parties	20.3	41.9	37.8	100.0
Medium trust in parties	14.7	50.3	35.1	100.0
Low trust in parties	18.9	38.9	42.2	100.0
All	**18.3**	**41.1**	**40.5**	100.0

Table 4.4: *Perceptions of the likely motivation of citizens' assembly decision-makers (%), by measures of partisanship*

Heading further into the process of decision-making, people hold mixed views about the likely motives of citizens' assembly members. Just under one in five think that they would be mainly driven by self interest, while the remainder of respondents are evenly split in their anticipation of sectional and common interest motivations: 41 percent think members would make decisions to serve their own community; 41 percent think they would make decisions to serve everyone. There are no significant differences between individuals who feel close to at least one party and those who are distant from all parties (χ^2 (2, N = 853) = 1.19, p = .55). Similarly, there is no significant variation in anticipated decision-making motivation across different levels of trust in parties (χ^2 (4, N = 779) = 7.76, p = .10). While not a majority, it is arguably impressive that, across these variables oriented towards the nature of decision-making, four in ten people broadly anticipate citizens' assembly members to be driven by the common interest. Respondents were not asked whether or not they thought this would be a *good* thing, perhaps explaining the lack of individual-level variation predicted by H1b, but this distribution of expectations implies a healthy perceived capacity for citizens' assemblies to engage in deliberation.

	No role	Recommendation	Final decision	*Totals*
Catholic	13.3	62.2	24.4	*100.0*
Protestant	17.6	58.3	24.1	*100.0*
Trust out-group	15.5	55.9	28.7	*100.0*
Do not trust out-group	15.1	65.0	19.9	*100.0*
All	**15.8**	**61.2**	**23.0**	*100.0*

Table 4.5: *Perceptions of the likely motivation of citizens' assembly decision-makers (%), by measures of group identity and inter-group trust*

On the potential for a citizens' assembly to influence policy output, Table 4.5 shows that an overwhelming majority of respondents say that such a body should play some sort of role in the process of taking decisions. Most (61 percent) think it should have the power to make a recommendation, while nearly a quarter think a citizens' assembly should be able to take a binding decision. Only 16 percent say that it should be given no role at all. Interestingly, there are no significant differences in the attitudes of Catholic and Protestant respondents (χ^2 (2, N = 819) = 2.73, p = .26). In other words, members of the traditional minority group are just as likely as members of the traditional majority group to support a citizens' assembly having a formal role, with a further alignment of preferences on the precise nature of that role. We do observe significant variation in the preferences of individuals across different levels of out-group trust. Offering partial support for H1c, respondents who report a high level of out-group trust are significantly more likely to support a citizens' assembly being able to take a final decision; those who are less trusting of out-group members are more likely to supporting it having an advisory role (χ^2 (2, N = 700) = 7.87, p < .05). They are, however, equally likely to support it having *some* role compared to no role (χ^2 (1, N = 701) = 0.02, p = .90). On the whole, most people see a place for citizens' assemblies in the political system.

Taking a broader view, to what extent do people see citizens' assemblies as a legitimate problem-solving device compared to other possibilities? Figure 4.2 shows that respondents are either more or just as likely to support a citizens' assembly compared to available alternatives, confirming H2. This novel form of decision-making received a mean level of support of 2.63 (*SD* = 1.28) on our five-point scale, recalibrated to run from 0 ('very bad idea') to 4 ('very good idea'). This is statistically indistinguishable from the level of support for the default response of holding inter-party talks chaired by the UK government (*M* = 2.59; *SD* = 1.11).[62] It is slightly higher than that for a more familiar form of citizen-based decision-making, a referendum (*M* = 2.51; *SD* = 1.20). While this difference is statistically significant, the magnitude is not overly large.

In contrast, other modes of decision-making were much less well received. Persevering with the system through cross-party talks chaired by an international diplomat was seen as a particularly bad idea (*M* = 1.39; *SD* = 1.36).[63] Giving voters the chance to reset the configuration of the system in an election was not seen much differently (*M* = 1.57; *SD* = 1.23). While abandoning the system with direct rule from Westminster was far from a widely favoured option, it is perhaps notable in itself that enjoyed a higher level of support than the two former ways of persevering with the system (*M* = 1.95; *SD* = 1.34). Put another way, a majority of people thought that each of these three responses to crisis would be a mostly bad idea. For context, 66 percent said that a citizens' assembly would be a good or very good idea, excluding the 5 percent of survey participants who expressed a 'don't know'

[62] Differences in means were tested using paired samples t-tests (two-tailed), with an alpha level of .05.

[63] The difference in the level of support for inter-party talks chaired by the British government and by an international diplomat is striking. The particularly weak level of support for the latter may reflect the public's frustration at the breakdown of talks chaired by the American diplomats Richard Haass and Meghan O'Sullivan in late 2013.

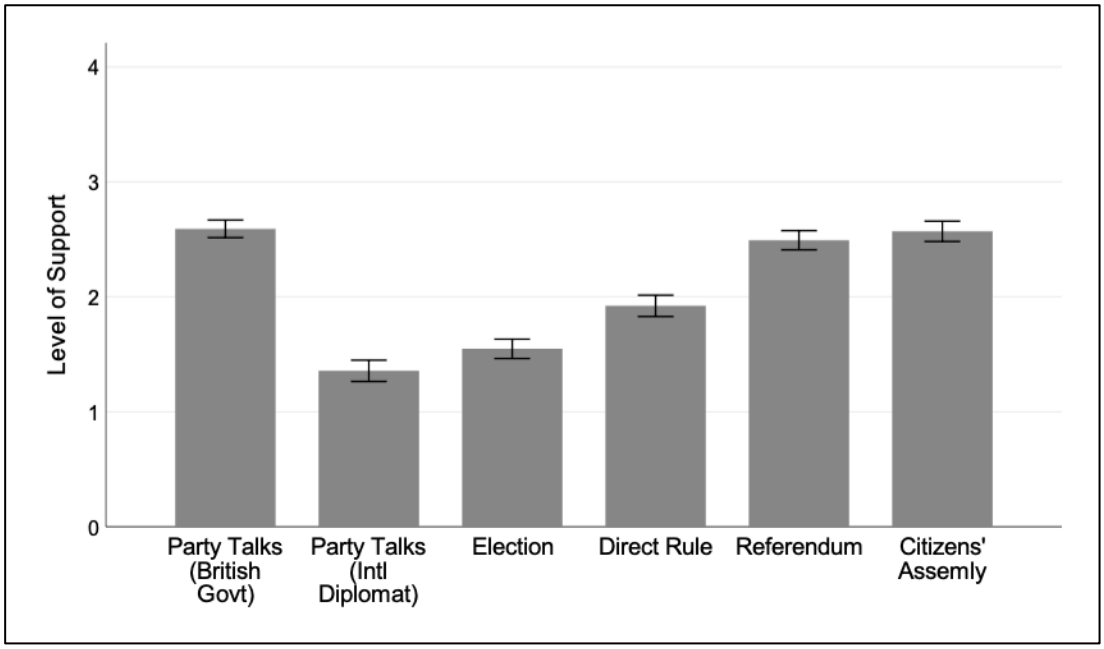


Figure 4.2: *Levels of support for different modes of decision-making (0 = very bad idea, 4 = very good idea; N = 1,015)*

response. Similarly, a large majority expressed a positive view towards inter-party talks chaired by the UK government (67 percent), and a referendum (61 percent).

Underneath these aggregate findings, there is some important variation at the individual-level. Even though a citizens' assembly received a similarly high level of support to two other more conventional modes of decision-making, different factors are associated with each set of positive evaluations. In the first of three direct comparisons, the logistic models presented in Table 4.6 estimate the probability of supporting a *citizens' assembly* compared to *cross-party talks* chaired by the UK government, the default crisis response. The dependent variable is a binary outcome, coded '1' where the respondent gives a higher level of support for a citizens' assembly compared to cross-party talks, and '0' otherwise. Excluding invalid responses, 35 percent of cases fall into the former category and 66 percent fall into the latter, which includes 31 percent of cases giving a higher score to cross-party talks and 34 percent evaluating the two options with the same level of support.

	1	2	3	4
	Support for Citizens' Assembly over Party Talks			
Selection				
Non-voter (ref: voter)	1.114 (.188)	-	-	1.058 (.286)
Ethno-national moderation (high = more moderate)	**1.222** **(.119)***	-	-	1.031 (.155)
Decision-Making				
Distant from all parties (ref: close to at least one party)	-	.857 (.202)	-	1.057 (.277)
Trust in parties (high = more trusting)	-	**.784** **(.082)****	-	**.773** **(.097)****
Decision-Taking				
Protestant (ref: Catholic)	-	-	**.585** **(.157)****	**.483** **(.204)****
Trust out-group (ref: do not trust out-group)	-	-	1.276 (.157)	1.283 (.198)
Controls				
Age	1.001 (.004)	.996 (.005)	1.001 (.004)	1.001 (.006)
Female (ref: male)	**1.334** **(.154)***	**1.361** **(.167)***	1.210 (.157)	**1.517** **(.197)****
ABC1 (ref: C2DE)	**.744** **(.155)***	**.607** **(.169)****	**.705** **(.160)****	**.611** **(.201)****
Constant	**.310** **(.375)****	1.112 (.327)	.653 (.261)	1.006 (.541)
N	777	664	742	509
-2 Log likelihood	997.75	835.30	937.33	612.65
Nagelkerke R^2	.02	.04	.04	.09
χ^2 (d.f.)	12.74 (5)**	20.79 (5)***	20.07 (5)***	32.14 (9)***

Entries are odds ratios from logistic regressions; standard errors are reported in parentheses. The dependent variable is support for a citizens' assembly over party talks chaired by the British government (coded '1' if support for a citizens' assembly is higher, '0' if it is equal or lower). Odds ratios greater than 1 indicate a positive association; odds ratios less than 1 indicate a negative association.

*$p < .10$; **$p < .05$; ***$p < .01$

Table 4.6: *Predicting support for a citizens' assembly over cross-party talks chaired by the British government*

In line with H3a, the first regression model in Table 4.6 shows that people who hold more ethno-nationally moderate ideological views are significantly more likely to support a citizens' assembly over UK government-chaired talks between the political parties, controlling for age, gender and social class. However, the effect disappears after the full range of variables enters the equation in the final model. Here, we see a highly significant negative relationship between levels of trust in political parties and citizens' assembly support. The more individuals trust political parties, the less they support a citizens' assembly as a response to crisis over the default alternative. This makes logical sense: those who trust political parties should be more likely, or just as likely, to support political parties in finding a solution to a crisis. Conversely, it is understandable for those who distrust political parties to be considerably more enthusiastic about an alternative centred on citizens, consistent with H3a. In Chapter Three we saw that people with a low level of trust in political parties are particularly dissatisfied with the way democracy works, indicating that citizens' assemblies have the potential to add real value to decision-making from their perspective.

In Table 4.6 we also observe striking variation along the lines of community background. Contrary to H3a, Protestants are significantly less likely than Catholics to support a citizens' assembly over traditional cross-party talks chaired by the UK government. It is likely that members of the Protestant community, who typically hold a British national identity, are somewhat more attracted to a process in which the UK government plays a formal role, even if only in a facilitation capacity. On the other hand, members of the Catholic community, who generally see themselves as Irish, are unlikely to have a similar kind of attachment, leading them to evaluate a citizen-centred alternative mode of decision-making more favourably.

	1	2	3	4
	Support for Referendum over Party Talks			
Selection				
Non-voter (ref: voter)	.831 (.207)	-	-	.931 (.291)
Ethno-national moderation (high = more moderate)	1.048 (.123)	-	-	1.143 (.157)
Decision-Making				
Distant from all parties (ref: close to at least one party)	-	.822 (.212)	-	.856 (.282)
Trust in parties (high = more trusting)	-	**.745** **(.088)*****	-	**.743** **(.102)*****
Decision-Taking				
Protestant (ref: Catholic)	-	-	.795 (.165)	.793 (.205)
Trust out-group (ref: do not trust out-group)	-	-	1.080 (.165)	1.174 (.201)
Controls				
Age	.996 (.005)	**.990** **(.005)****	.998 (.004)	.996 (.006)
Female (ref: male)	1.072 (.163)	1.094 (.173)	1.069 (.165)	1.166 (.199)
ABC1 (ref: C2DE)	**.745** **(.164)***	.771 (.175)	**.748** **(.168)***	**.658** **(.205)****
Constant	**.492** **(.388)***	1.327 (.339)	**.532** **(.271)****	.826 (.548)
N	762	655	732	507
-2 Log Likelihood	912.78	786.07	866.84	599.83
Nagelkerke R^2	.01	.04	.01	.05
χ^2 (d.f.)	4.65 (5)	17.60 (5)***	5.65 (5)	17.01 (9)**

Entries are odds ratios from logistic regressions; standard errors are reported in parentheses. The dependent variable is support for a referendum over party talks chaired by the British government (coded '1' if support for a referendum is higher, '0' if it is equal or lower). Odds ratios greater than 1 indicate a positive association; odds ratios less than 1 indicate a negative association.

*$p < .10$; **$p < .05$; ***$p < .01$

Table 4.7: *Predicting support for a citizens' assembly over cross-party talks chaired by the British government*

Of course, a citizens' assembly is not the only mode of decision-making that involves ordinary citizens directly. Table 4.7 offers a direct replication of the logistic models of Table 4.6, except the outcome variable is now support for *referendums* over *cross-party talks* chaired by the UK government. Excluding invalid responses, 28 percent of respondents evaluated referendums more positively than the default option of cross-party talks (coded as '1' in the binary outcome measure). A further 34 percent gave referendums a lower score, while 39 percent gave both modes of decision-making an equivalent score (coded as '0' in the outcome measure). On the whole, Table 4.7 tells a broadly similar story to Table 4.6. For example, lower levels of trust in political parties significantly predict support for referendums relative to an elite-led alternative. However, there are some important distinctions.

Notably, there are no longer significant differences in evaluations between Catholics and Protestants. Perhaps the latter are more willing to look beyond a facilitation role for the UK government when the citizen-based alternative mode of decision-making is one with which they are already familiar. Turning to the control variables, it is also notable that while both citizens' assemblies and referendums are both particularly supported by individuals from a working-class background, women are only significantly more likely to support the former, not the latter. These variables are not the direct focus of the present research, but both women and people from a working-class background are typically under-represented by conventional forms of representative democracy. When women weigh up citizens' assemblies and referendums against the default option of inter-party talks, they do not evaluate the citizen-based alternatives in the same way. Thus, despite the two modes sharing a broadly similar profile of individual-level support, citizens' assemblies have the potential to add democratic value for women in a way that referendums do not.

	1	2	3	4
	Support for Citizens' Assembly over Referendum			
Selection				
Non-voter (ref: voter)	**1.581 (.191)****	-	-	**2.135 (.285)*****
Ethno-national moderation (high = more moderate)	1.006 (.119)	-	-	.813 (.154)
Decision-Making				
Distant from all parties (ref: close to at least one party)	-	1.151 (.199)	-	1.034 (.282)
Trust in parties (high = more trusting)	-	.961 (.080)	-	1.078 (.093)
Decision-Taking				
Protestant (ref: Catholic)	-	-	.878 (.158)	.819 (.202)
Trust out-group (ref: do not trust out-group)	-	-	1.182 (.157)	1.140 (.198)
Controls				
Age	.998 (.004)	.999 (.005)	.994 (.004)	.997 (.006)
Female (ref: male)	1.019 (.156)	.994 (.167)	.887 (.158)	1.063 (.197)
ABC1 (ref: C2DE)	1.105 (.156)	1.037 (.167)	.998 (.159)	1.204 (.200)
Constant	.472 (.375)	**.520 (.326)****	.705 (.261)	.581 (.537)
N	759	654	734	503
-2 Log Likelihood	972.56	834.33	932.00	611.51
Nagelkerke R^2	.01	.00	.01	.03
χ^2 (d.f.)	7.32 (5)	1.03 (5)	3.79 (5)	10.89 (9)

Entries are odds ratios from logistic regressions; standard errors are reported in parentheses. The dependent variable is support for a citizens' assembly over a referendum (coded '1' if support for a referendum is higher, '0' if it is equal or lower). Odds ratios greater than 1 indicate a positive association; odds ratios less than 1 indicate a negative association.

*$p < .10$; **$p < .05$; ***$p < .01$

Table 4.8: *Predicting support for a citizens' assembly over a referendum*

This leaves us to directly compare respondents' relative evaluations of the two citizen-based supplementary modes of decision-making. The outcome variable in Table 4.8 is support for *citizens' assemblies* over *referendums*. Excluding invalid responses, 35 percent of cases are coded '1', indicating a higher level of support for the former over the latter. Of the cases coded '0' on the outcome measure, 26 percent evaluate referendums more positively than citizens' assemblies, while 40 percent evaluate the two modes with an equivalent score. Across each of the variables considered in the final equation, there is almost no evidence of individual-level variation explaining support for one outcome over another. The only exception relates to voting behaviour: individuals who say they would not vote in a future election are significantly more likely to support citizens' assemblies rather than referendums, compared to individuals who say they would vote for a political party.

To summarise at this point, a range of cross-sectional evidence cumulatively suggests that citizens' assemblies can play a role in democratic decision-making that is broadly perceived to be legitimate. Key features of their selection, decision-making, and decision-taking are well-received: most people say that members would be capable of making good decisions, many say that citizens' assembly decisions would be motivated by serving the common good, and an overwhelming majority say that citizens' assemblies should have some role in decision-making, either in an advisory or binding capacity. In the context of a political crisis in Northern Ireland, most people think that a citizens' assembly would be a good idea as a response. Notably, compared to the default response of holding inter-party talks, citizens' assemblies are particularly favoured by individuals with low levels of trust in political parties – the same individuals who are particularly likely to be dissatisfied with the way democracy works, suggesting the constructive potential for citizens'

assemblies to help target and control some of the factors driving Northern Ireland's democratic deficit.

4.3 Study Two

The results of Study One provide an initial overview of maxi-public attitudes toward an institutionalised mini-public, but they are vulnerable to two criticisms. To begin with, the test of H2 may have overestimated the level of support for a citizens' assembly compared to other modes of decision-making. Here, the dependent variable only measured relative perceptions of its legitimacy in general terms: the extent to which a citizens' assembly would be a good or bad idea as a decision-making device. Perhaps this is too general a measure, even when considered against other favourable attitudes towards key features of the way citizens' assemblies are selected, the way they make decisions, and their formal role in the taking of decisions. A second issue is the observational nature of the study, making it difficult to directly compare people's perceptions of one form of decision-making against another. Therefore, a follow-up study is conducted to address these potential limitations.

What might constitute a tougher test examining the perceived legitimacy of a citizens' assembly? Gibson *et al.* (2014: 840) note that the "decisions of legitimate institutions, even when handing down unpopular decisions, seem to carry with them an obligation to accept and obey." Since legitimacy is fundamentally about the *way* in which a decision is taken, rather than the substance of the decision itself (Tyler, 2006), we must establish that procedural evaluations of citizens' assemblies are able to withstand people's instrumental considerations. To what extent do these favourable perceptions translate into acquiescence, irrespective of instrumentality?

People who get the results they want, the 'winners', are less likely to question the procedures through which the favourable results were generated (Nadeau and Blais, 1993). In contrast, 'losers' will have greater incentive to critically reflect on the decision-making arrangements. Their consent is necessary for the long-term stability of these arrangements (Anderson *et al.* 2005). For present purposes, one strategy for scrutinising the robustness of the perceived legitimacy of citizens' assembly decision-making is to introduce an objection precondition to the research design:

> [L]egitimacy takes on importance primarily in the presence of an *objection precondition*. When people approve of a decision, the legitimacy of the decision maker is of little consequence since people are already getting what they want. When the decision is unpopular, its efficacy hinges upon the perceived legitimacy of the decision-making process and institution (Gibson and Caldeira, 2003: 4; original emphasis).

It is when people are presented with an *outcome* with which they personally disagree that we can obtain a much clearer indication about their fundamental attitudes to the legitimacy of the *process*. If an individual genuinely perceives a particular mode of decision-making to be legitimate, he or she will accept the decision irrespective of whether or not he or she likes it. Thus, the outcome variable in the present follow-up study will be operationalised as *decision acceptance*. An experimental research design is adopted to provide a more rigorous test of its relationship to the mode of decision-making, the independent variable. The main hypothesis here is derived directly from H2, with a further individual-level expectation that stronger levels of ethno-national ideology will reduce levels of decision acceptance, regardless of how the decision was taken, since a contested issue in a deeply divided place is likely to be much more salient for those with the strongest levels of ethno-nationalism:

H4: *An unfavourable decision taken by a citizens' assembly will be accepted to the same extent as the same unfavourable decision taken by alternative modes of decision-making.*

H5: *In general, levels of acceptance will be lower among individuals with stronger levels of ethno-nationalism.*

4.3.1 Data & Method

Participants were recruited by Ipsos-MORI across two waves in 2017 (in February and April). Sampling points were randomly selected from Northern Ireland's 285 electoral wards, with quotas applied for age, gender, social class and location. The 2,015 participants were representative of the population: 52 percent of participants were female and 48 percent male. In terms of community background, 46 percent of respondents came from a Protestant background and 42 percent were Catholic, while 10 percent identified with another or no religious group.[64] In face-to-face Computer-Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI), all participants were presented with a short briefing on the salient and contentious issue of Irish language policy:[65]

> There has been discussion in recent years about whether or not to introduce special rights for people in Northern Ireland who speak Irish. Some people have called for an Irish Language Act, which would be a new law to protect the rights of Irish language speakers and to promote the use of the Irish language in Northern Ireland. Others disagree and are opposed to any special rights for Irish language speakers.

[64] In the 2011 Census, 42 percent identified as Protestant and 40 percent as Catholic.
[65] The issue strongly divides political elites and the public along ethno-national lines. Unionist parties have repeatedly signalled their opposition to an Irish Language Act, viewing it as a threat to Northern Ireland's 'Britishness'; nationalist parties are staunchly in favour of such legislation, arguing that it would be a vital demonstration of cross-community respect. The experiment was conducted when the issue was salient, but before it escalated to become a contributing factor to deeper political crisis. At the time of writing, it is a core issue behind an impasse involving Northern Ireland's largest parties.

At this point, respondents were asked about their personal preference on the issue: whether they support or oppose the introduction of an Irish Language Act, and the extent to which they do so (strongly or somewhat). Among the 90 percent indicating a preference either way (validating the salience of the issue), 65 percent said they supported the introduction of such legislation, leaving 35 percent opposed. Responses closely reflected ethno-national positions: 96 percent of nationalists were in favour of an Irish Language Act, compared to 70 percent of unionists who were against it. People identifying as neither nationalist nor unionist were largely supportive, by a margin of 69 percent in favour to 31 percent against new legislation.

All respondents were then presented with a scenario in which the issue of Irish language legislation directly sparks a political crisis, adding specificity to the more general crisis scenario presented to respondents in Study One:

> Suppose that at some point in the near future the issue of Irish language rights was brought before the Northern Ireland Assembly. After debating it, a majority of MLAs supported a new law protecting Irish language rights, but it was blocked by the largest unionist party using its power of veto. This led to a worsening of relations among the political parties, creating gridlock in the Assembly and a new political crisis.

Respondents were randomly assigned to one of six treatments, corresponding directly to the six different modes of decision-making presented in Study One.[66] They were told that a decision had been taken on whether or not to introduce an Irish Language Act, with the mode of decision-making manipulated. Crucially, the decision presented was one with which each respondent personally disagreed. In

[66] Randomisation checks (performed via linear regressions) found no significant demographic differences across each experimental group. Differences were also tested on attitudinal and political variables, including the respondent's position on an Irish Language Act and his or her ethno-national identity. Again, there were no significant differences across any of the groups.

other words, respondents who initially indicated their opposition to an Irish Language Act were told a decision had been taken to *introduce* an Irish Language Act; if they stated their support for an Irish Language Act, they were told a decision had been taken *not to introduce* such an Act. An objection precondition was unavoidably absent for the 10 percent of respondents who expressed a 'don't know' position towards the issue.[67] For the purposes of the interview, they were randomly assigned to one of the two possible decisions, but were ultimately excluded from the analysis. Finally, respondents were asked the extent to which they would accept the decision, and whether or not they would be willing for their assigned mode of decision-making to be used again in the event of another political crisis.[68] Table 4.9 shows the initial distribution of issue positions across the experimental groups.

	Support	**Oppose**	**Don't know**	*Totals*
Party talks (British Govt) (*n* = 336)	60.4	28.0	11.6	100.0
Party talks (Intl diplomat) (*n* = 338)	58.3	32.0	9.8	100.0
Election (*n* = 320)	57.8	35.0	7.2	100.0
Direct rule (*n* = 327)	60.9	27.8	11.3	100.0
Referendum (*n* = 345)	58.6	30.4	11.0	100.0
Citizens' assembly (*n* = 349)	61.3	28.1	10.6	100.0
All (*N* = 2,015)	**59.6**	**30.2**	**10.3**	100.0

Table 4.9: *Levels of support for and opposition to an Irish Language Act (%), by experimental group*

[67] The 14.9 percent of respondents who initially responded 'don't know' regarding their preference on an Irish Language Act were probed further: "If you *had* to choose, would you be slightly more inclined to *support* special rights for Irish language speakers, or slightly more inclined to *oppose* special rights for Irish language speakers?" They could still respond 'Really don't know'. These respondents (10.3 percent in total) were excluded from the analysis.

[68] For the former item, response categories were: (1) 'I would find this almost impossible to accept, (2) 'I would not like it but could live with it if I had to', and (3) 'I would happily accept the decision'. The second two responses were collapsed into a single category to create a dichotomous measure of decision acceptance. For the latter item, the response categories were simply: (1) 'Yes, I would be happy' and (2) 'No, I would not be happy'. Unprompted 'don't know' responses were recorded.

Figure 4.3 summarises the operation of the experiment and its overall logic. Refer to *Appendix C* for the full questionnaire.

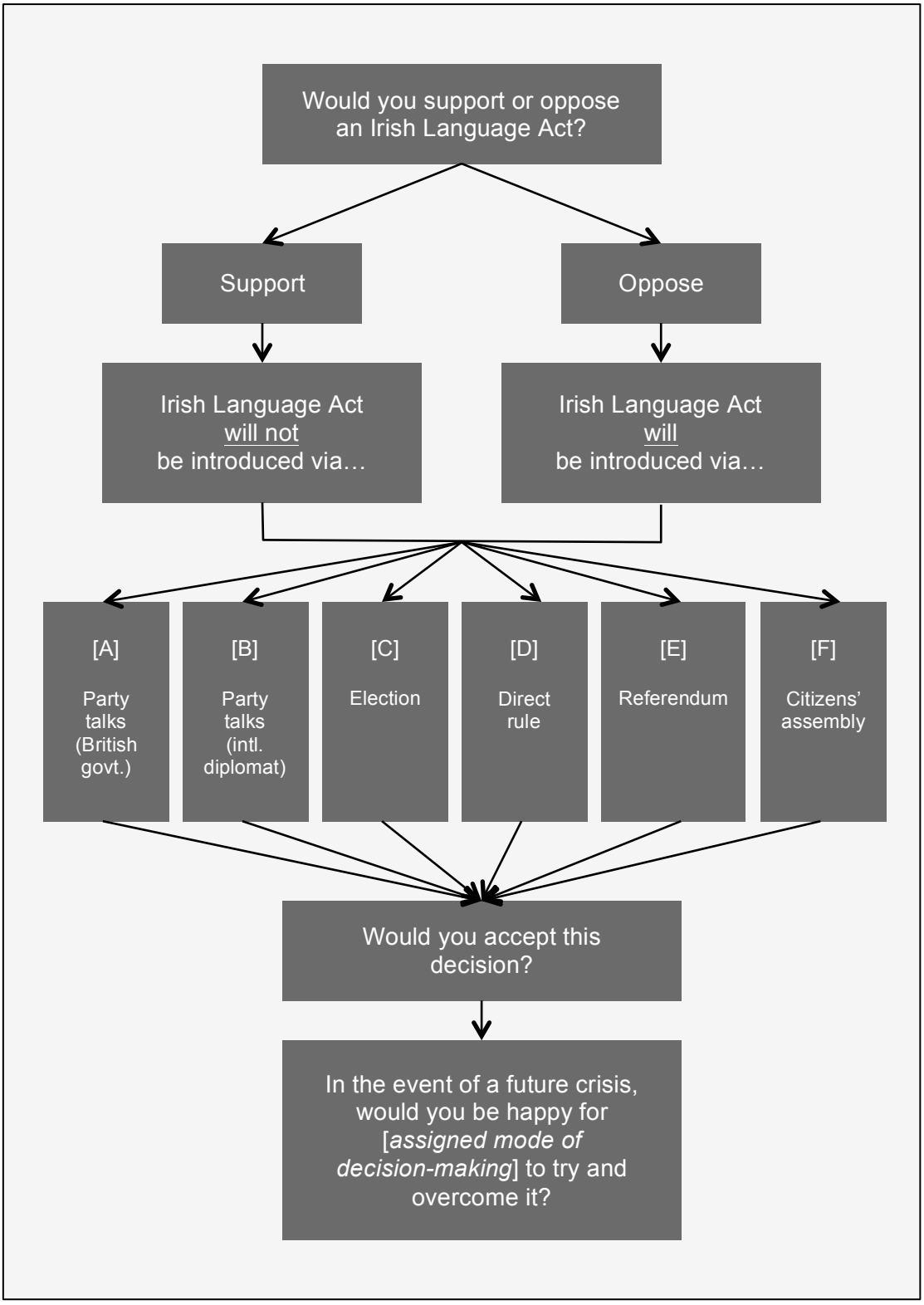


Figure 4.3: *Summary of experiment*

4.3.2 Results

Compared to the observational results of the cross-sectional survey in Study One, the follow-up experiment finds much variation in people's attitudes to different modes of decision-making. Figure 4.4 displays the percentage of respondents in each group who said they would accept or not accept the decision on an Irish Language Act. Across all groups, an average of 78 percent of respondents said they would accept the personally objectionable decision, leaving 22 percent who would refuse to accept it. In the citizens' assembly condition, the acceptance rate was 75 percent. This is not significantly higher or lower (at the $p < .05$ level) than the acceptance rate in almost all of the other groups, providing broad support for H4. The one exception is the referendum condition, in which 94 percent of respondents said they would accept a personally objectionable decision. This level of decision acceptance is significantly higher than all other decision-making conditions of the experiment.[69]

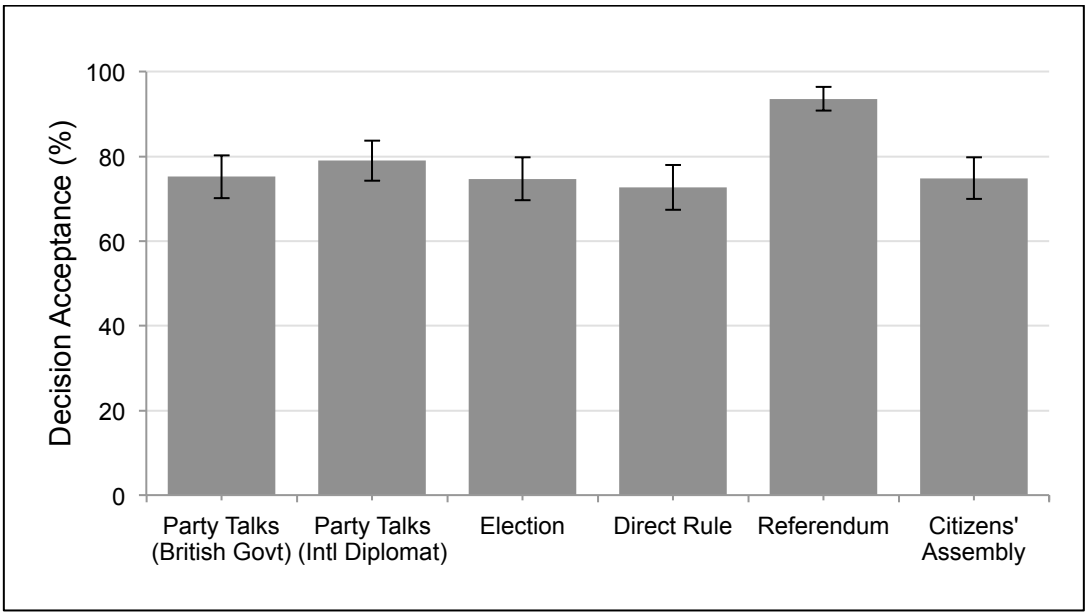


Figure 4.4: *Decision acceptance levels (%) by mode of decision-making (*N *= 1,728)*

[69] Significant differences are identified by logistic regression; results are reported in *Appendix D.*

In the previous cross-sectional study, a referendum was not supported above any other mode of decision-making as a procedural response to political crisis. In the experiment, however, it appears that there is something about a referendum that causes an unfavourable decision on a specific, contentious issue, to be so widely accepted. Part of the explanation lies at the individual-level. On the whole, people with relatively strong ethno-national positions were less likely to accept an unfavourable decision compared to those who hold more moderate positions. However, this relationship varied across different modes of decision-making. Of those who felt most strongly about the specific issue of Irish language legislation (either positively or negatively), just under 60 percent of respondents said they would accept the decision of a citizens' assembly, compared to just under 90 percent of respondents who held a less intense preference on the issue (see Figure 4.5). When the decision was taken by referendum, the decision acceptance levels converged. However, this moderating effect is statistically insignificant ($p = .84$).[70]

Using a more general measure of ethno-nationalism, self-reported ideology, the relationship is much more pronounced. Of the respondents identifying as strongly unionist or nationalist, just over 40 percent said they would accept an unfavourable decision on Irish language policy taken by a citizens' assembly – half the acceptance rate for respondents identifying as moderately nationalist or unionist, or neither. When the decision was taken by a referendum, however, individuals with strong and moderate ethno-national ideologies were just as likely to accept the decision: acceptance levels exceeded 90 percent in each case. This moderating effect is statistically significant ($p = .02$).

[70] The results from binary logistic regression models are reported in *Appendix D*.

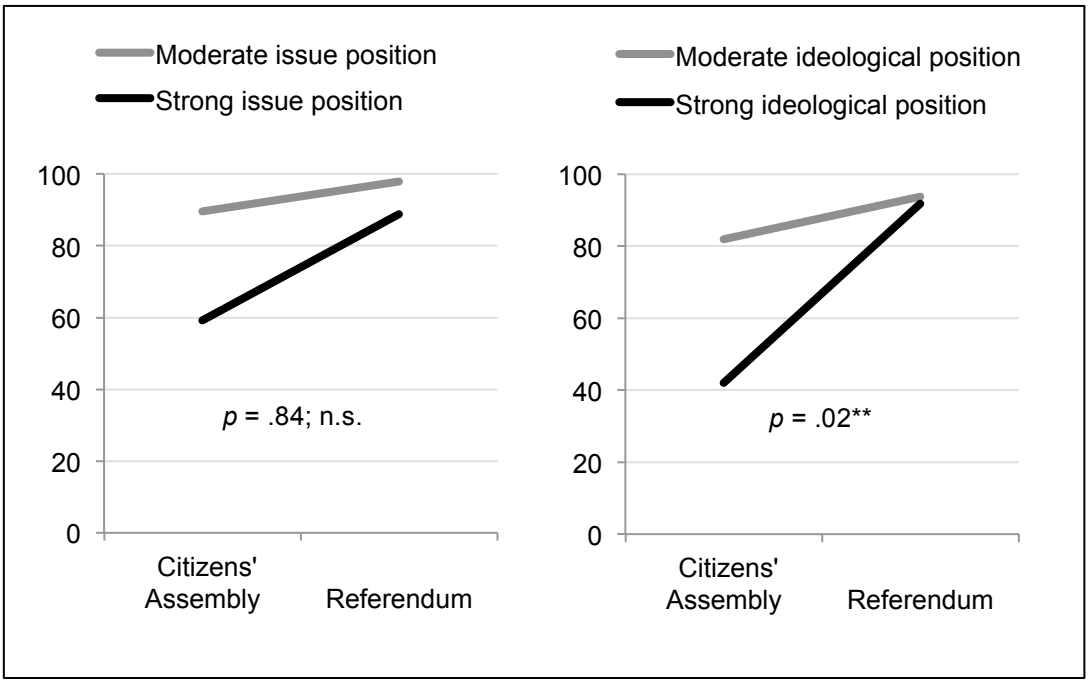


Figure 4.5: *Moderating effects of ethno-nationalism (strength of issue position; strength of ideological position) on decision acceptance (%), by mode of decision-making*

Compared to alternative modes of decision-making, a decision taken by a citizens' assembly was not regarded as *less* legitimate among those with the strongest ethno-national preferences; these individuals were less inclined to accept any unfavourable decision, wherever it originated, largely confirming H5. However, an unfavourable decision taken by a referendum was perceived to be significantly *more* legitimate among individuals identifying as strongly nationalist or unionist. This distinction is important, as it implies that procedural evaluations of the legitimacy of citizens' assemblies are robust enough to withstand instrumental considerations to the same extent as most conventional modes of decision-making, but that referendums have a unique capacity to do so in a deeply divided context. It should be noted that only a minority of respondents (19 percent) identify with the strongest level of ethno-national ideology, but these individuals appear particularly sensitive to the legitimising qualities of referendums over other modes of decision-making.

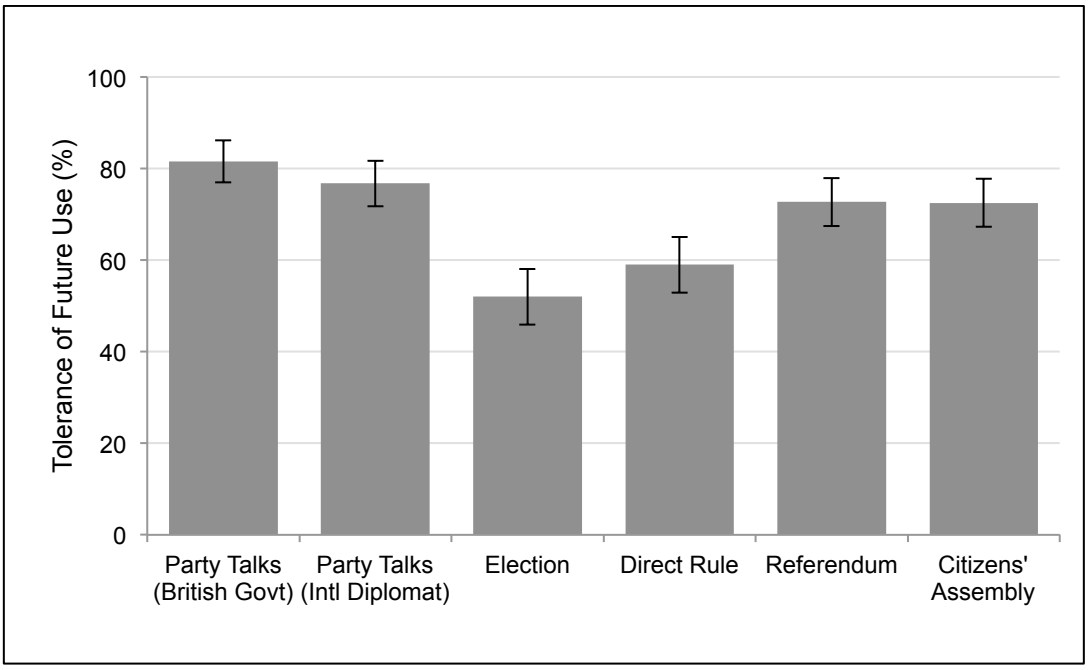


Figure 4.6: *Levels of tolerance (%) for each mode of decision-making being used in response to a future crisis (*N *= 1,728)*

Finally, as well as being asked the extent to which they accepted the specific decision on an Irish Language Act, respondents were also asked whether or not they would be happy for their assigned mode of decision-making to be used to try and overcome a future political crisis on another issue. This tests whether or not the mere generation of an unfavourable decision by a particular mode of decision-making substantially reduces tolerance for it being used again. Does losers' consent extend into the future, as well as the present? Comparing Figure 4.6 to Figure 4.5, we see that the levels of tolerance for future usage are broadly similar to those for levels of decision acceptance with respect to three modes of decision-making: both sets of inter-party talks and the citizens' assembly.[71] Considerably lower levels were observed for the election, direct rule and referendum conditions.[72]

[71] Levels of tolerance for future use are two percentage points lower for citizens' assemblies and inter-party talks chaired by an international diplomat, compared to decision acceptance levels. They are six points higher for inter-party talks chaired by the British government.
[72] The differences were 23 points, 14 points, and 21 points respectively.

The underlying unpopularity of direct rule and elections, as established in Study One, likely accounts for these gaps. For referendums, 21 percent fewer respondents expressed support for them being used to overcome future political crises compared to the percentage expressing a willingness to accept an unfavourable decision reached by one. The magnitude of this difference is likely to derive considerably from the high level of decision acceptance (94 percent) to begin with. It also implies that just because citizens are extremely likely to accept an unfavourable decision taken by a particular mechanism does not mean they support its frequent usage. In other words, while referendums have appear to have a particular quality that produces overwhelming acceptance of unpopular decisions, their recurrent application to polarising issues may test losers' consent over time. This underscores the empirical distinction between individuals' general attitudes toward a mode of decision-making and their propensity to accept an unfavourable decision taken by exactly the same mechanism.

In short, some modes of decision-making are associated with less variation across the two outcome measures than others. As far as citizens' assemblies are concerned, aggregate changes are minimal: among 'losers', levels of decision acceptance and levels of tolerance for the future use of citizens' assemblies are high and largely static.

4.3 Discussion & Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to explore the general attitudes of the maxi-public towards citizens' assemblies. Are they perceived to be legitimate devices that can meaningfully contribute to democratic decision-making? The results of both

studies are encouraging. Turning first to some of the key procedural features of citizens' assemblies themselves, the cross-sectional results of Study One reveal largely favourable attitudes on the capacity of ordinary people to be selected to serve as members, on the likelihood of members making decisions for the benefit of everyone, and on citizens' assemblies playing some sort of formal role ahead of political decisions being taken. With no significant individual-level effects across the variables examined, these attitudes appear to be broadly held, and provide initial evidence that citizens' assemblies have attributes across their input, throughput and output stages of decision-making that can be viewed as legitimate. Put another way, if attitudes displayed much greater scepticism toward the idea of ordinary people being selected to play a role in political decision-making, if citizens' assembly members were expected to be overwhelmingly motivated by personal or group interests, or if a majority of people thought that citizens' assemblies should play *no* formal role, such findings would have severely challenged the view that citizens' assemblies have qualities perceived to be legitimate. That these conclusions do *not* emerge from survey responses is a non-trivial sign of the net positive role that citizens' assemblies can potentially fulfil.

In addition, the results of Study One show that citizens' assemblies are evaluated positively when compared to more conventional modes of decision-making. As a response to an acute political crisis in Northern Ireland, the idea of supplementing the system with a citizens' assembly receives a significantly higher level of support than the idea of persevering with the system through an election or cross-party talks chaired by an international diplomat, as well as compared to the idea of abandoning the system with direct rule from Westminster. The idea of a citizens' assembly supplementing the system receives a similar level of support to

two alternatives: persevering the existing system with cross-party talks chaired by the British government, and supplementing the system by holding a referendum on the issue behind the crisis.

A citizens' assembly is appealing over both of these alternatives for two main reasons. First, it is the option that is arguably the most likely to provide a practical, measured, and constructive way out of the crisis – especially if cross-party talks routinely fail to reach agreement, and since a referendum (at least if used on its own) could serve to polarise elites and the public further, without addressing some of the underlying sources of polarisation. Second, and crucially, citizens' assemblies receive particularly high levels of support from individuals found to be highly dissatisfied with the way democracy works in Chapter Three. Notably, for example, people who distrust political parties are significantly more likely to support citizens' assemblies over holding cross-party talks. Non-voters, meanwhile, are significantly more likely to support citizens' assemblies over referendums. These findings are intuitive: people who distrust political parties (who are substantial in number) are unlikely to see them as the answer to political crisis; people who do not vote are unlikely to be enthusiastic about the potential for voting to solve problems. Taken together, these results suggest that citizens' assemblies have the potential to add a democratic quality to decision-making in a way that more conventional alternatives do not.

The results of Study Two show that people's favourable attitudes towards the general idea of citizens' assemblies are robust. The experimental study demonstrates that people are just as willing to accept an unfavourable decision taken by a citizens' assembly on a salient ethno-national issue compared to the same decision taken by four of the other conventional modes of decision-making. If levels of support for a

citizens' assembly had been hollow or superficial, this experiment provided an effective opportunity to expose people's underlying reservations. Indeed, as Anderson *et al.* (2005: 4) contend, evaluating the way 'losers' respond to an outcome they dislike constitutes an unparalleled test of democratic legitimacy:

> [I]f democratic procedures are to continue in the long run, then the losers must, somehow, overcome any bitterness and resentment and be willing, first, to accept the decision … and, second, to play again next time. That they would do either is not altogether obvious.

From this perspective, it is reassuring that each mode of decision-making considered in the experiment was associated with a high level of decision acceptance. We know from Study One that people evaluate each of these democratic instruments in markedly different ways, yet are broadly willing to prioritise the democratic norm of decision acceptance over any negative procedural or instrumental considerations.

The significantly higher level of decision acceptance in the referendum condition deserves serious reflection, not least for its paradoxical implications for a deeply divided place experiencing a political crisis. On the one hand, people with the strongest ethno-national views are significantly more likely to accept a referendum decision with which they disagree compared to all other modes of decision-making, including decisions from a citizens' assembly. On the other hand, referendums, given their majoritarian nature, are generally seen as excessively crude instruments of decision-making that are often inappropriate for deeply divided places (McGarry and O'Leary, 2009). One possible way of channelling the unique legitimating quality of referendums, while attempting to overcome their polarising bluntness, is to combine their usage with citizens' assemblies. For example, a citizens' assembly could initially be held over an extended period to forensically consider the issue

behind the crisis. It would offer an appropriate environment in which citizens could learn about the different aspects of the issue, carefully deliberating over the best way forward, before producing a collective recommendation. This recommendation could subsequently be put to all citizens in a popular vote, thus combining the deliberative benefits of a non-partisan mini-public environment with the aggregative benefits of giving everyone the chance to influence the final decision. This idea will be considered further in Chapter Seven.

It is also important to reflect on the limitations of the present study. Most obviously, it only addresses the single issue of Irish language policy. It is possible that other salient ethno-national issues, as well as salient *non*-ethno-national issues, could produce different patterns of decision acceptance across modes of decision-making. However, this concern should not be overstated. At the time of writing, divisions over Irish language policy remain the principal obstacle to the restoration of a power-sharing government featuring Northern Ireland's main political parties. The results of the experiment can be reasonably generalised to another issue of this nature and magnitude; external validity may be reduced for less salient issues, or those lacking an ethno-national dimension, but it was not ultimately a priority of this experiment to make such generalisations. A further experiment with manipulations for issue salience and issue domain could help disentangle these potential effects on decision acceptance across different modes of decision-making.

There are two additional questions that merit further investigation. First, does the perceived likelihood of 'winning' influence the acceptance of an objectionable decision? In other words, if you think you will be on the winning side, does that make you more likely to accept an unfavourable decision, even though you have been told that you are on the losing side? It is true, for example, that more people

support the introduction of an Irish Language Act than oppose it, by a ratio of about two to one. Implicitly, they may find it less plausible to be told that an Irish Language Act will *not* be introduced compared to those who are told that it will be introduced. This potential asymmetry in people's expectations may have an individual-level effect on the relationship between decision acceptance and the mode of decision-making. A second question deserving further research concerns the nature of decision acceptance. What does it mean *not* to accept a decision? There are presumably many different levels of objection, ranging from mild frustration to organised violence. These carry implications that go beyond the scope of the present research, but such questions will become more important if growing numbers of people consistently perceive themselves to be 'losers' from democratic decision-making.

Returning to the central focus of this thesis, this chapter has made an important contribution. Drawing on cross-sectional evidence, it shows that people have broadly favourable attitudes toward key features of citizens' assemblies, that citizens' assemblies receive a high degree of support compared to conventional modes of decision-making, and that citizens' assemblies receive particularly positive evaluations from individuals known to be dissatisfied with the way democracy works. Experimental evidence shows that these findings are robust. Taken together, these empirical results provide a strong case that citizens' assemblies are perceived to be highly democratic devices, and that they have the potential to *strengthen* the quality of democratic decision-making.

It is now necessary to explore their relative potential further by examining people's perceptions of the specific features of citizens' assemblies. Do the core design features of citizens' assemblies demonstrably promote the democratic

principles with which they are theoretically associated? Does the manner in which citizens' assemblies are selected, make decisions, and take decisions, have an effect on the extent to which they are perceived to be legitimate? And are there ways of designing citizens' assemblies that strengthen or weaken perceptions of their legitimacy in the challenging context of a deeply divided place? Through a series of complementary experiments, conducted online in parallel with one another, the three remaining empirical chapters of this thesis address these narrower questions of institutional design.

Chapter Five

THE PROCESS OF SELECTING DECISION-MAKERS

LEGITIMACY AT THE INPUT STAGE OF MINI-PUBLIC DECISION-MAKING

Mission Control: I have an activation procedure. I'd like you to copy it down.

[…]

Apollo 13: Okay. Ready to copy, Jack.

Radio communication between Mission Control and Apollo 13 Commander James Lovell, 13 April 1970 (NASA, 1970: 181)

In a democratic political system the *demos* are, somehow, involved in decision-making. In modern representative democracies, elections provide the mechanism by which citizens collectively provide an input into the political process. People elect professional politicians to translate their political preferences (the inputs of the system) into public policy (the outputs of the system), while the prospect of future elections incentivises political representatives to maintain a close proximity to voters' demands. The decision-makers of deliberative mini-publics, on the other hand, tend to be selected on a very different basis. Rather than being elected as to hold a professional occupation as a politician, members of a citizens' assembly are

randomly selected as citizens to fulfil a duty alongside their existing occupation, if applicable.

There are, thus, two important dimensions to the selection of the members of a citizens' assembly that are distinct from the conventional selection of the members of legislatures in a representative democracy. First, there is the *selection mechanism* itself: sortition as distinct from election. Second, there is the *profile* of the body's membership: 'ordinary citizens' as distinct from professional politicians. These twin features help to promote political equality. This chapter investigates the effect of both aspects of selection on the perceived legitimacy of citizens' assemblies. By examining the prototypical selection process of a citizens' assembly against other possible alternatives, it weighs up the relative effects of sortition (over election) and citizen decision-makers (over professional politicians). The results of an online experiment show that, overall, a citizens' assembly composed exclusively of randomly selected citizens is perceived as equally legitimate as one in which members are elected, or one in which members are a combination of ordinary citizens and elected politicians. However, the prototypical model is regarded as particularly legitimate among individuals who attach a high level of importance to political equality and those who identify as ethno-nationally moderate.

5.1 Promoting Political Equality

The concept of ordinary citizens being randomly selected to make decisions on behalf of the wider public is one that is both well established and familiar to most people. It is, however, generally restricted to one domain – the judicial system – in which juries play a fundamental role. The selection of jury members in this way

helps to underpin the legitimacy of the judicial process (Sealy and Cornish, 1973; Dwyer, 2002; Stone, 2009). In other parts of the political system, the concept of recruiting citizen decision-makers by lot remains largely alien, making mini-publics a particularly novel form of democratic innovation (Smith, 2009). And yet, as Fishkin (2009) argues, this mode of selection allowed early forms of democracy to implement a key principle: political equality.[73] For Fishkin (2009: 43), "The root notion of political equality is the equal consideration of political preferences." By selecting citizens at random, in theory everyone has an equal probability of becoming a member of a mini-public. With a large enough sample, the distribution of political preferences in a mini-public on a given dimension mirrors the distribution of these political preferences among citizens as a whole (Callenbach *et al.* 2008). Such a mechanism facilitates the fair inclusion of the attitudinal and demographic characteristics that exist among citizens within a target population.

Crucially, it also establishes a fair basis for exclusion. If we accept the practical constraint that all citizens of a jurisdiction cannot physically assemble to collectively engage in deliberative decision-making, apart from participating in purely aggregative forms of decision-making that are relatively unbounded by time and location, then we are forced to justify why some citizens are included in formal decision-making and most are, necessarily, excluded. For many deliberative theorists, this restriction conflicts with an ambition to broaden and deepen deliberation among *all* citizens in a given polity: "democratic legitimacy depends upon the ability of *all* those subject to a decision to participate in authentic deliberation" (Dryzek, 2000: 85; original emphasis). This ambition, for authentic

[73] Fishkin (2009: 43) argues that political equality was achieved in ancient Athens "first via random sampling" at the selection stage and "second via processes exhibiting political equality" in the subsequent stage of decision-making. He also recognises that political equality was only achieved with respect to the "limited population of citizens."

deliberation at the macro-level, can still be held while, at the same time, recognising that existing conditions render the realisation of such a goal extremely challenging. For example, as Fishkin (2009: 98-99) observes, allowing individuals to self-select as members of a mini-public typically results in participation by an unrepresentative sample of the population:

> Another alternative to random sampling and microcosmic deliberation is to hold public forums that are theoretically open to participation by anyone. But this alternative is not really inclusive and leads to domination by organised interests who are inevitably the ones who actually show up, and at best, issue publics (those especially interested in the topic).

By designing and creating the conditions conducive to deliberation at the micro-level, housed within a formal institution, participation is necessarily restricted to a limited number of citizens. Random sampling offers a mechanism through which a representative "microcosm" of the public can be selected, with the boundary of inclusion and exclusion resting on the principle of political equality (Fishkin, 2009: 96).

5.2 Selecting Members of Citizens' Assemblies

In an attempt to gather a representative cross-section of the population, citizens' assemblies are almost always selected via sortition. In the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly (BCCA) on electoral reform, members were selected by a multi-stage stratified random sampling procedure A large sample was initially drawn from a list of all registered voters, and these randomly selected individuals were invited to participate in the Citizens' Assembly; 7 percent responded positively (Fournier *et al.*,

2011: 54). In the final sample, there was stratification for gender, geography and age, producing a mini-public with an equal number of men and women – one member from each of British Columbia's (then) 79 electoral districts – and a broad range of age groups. Similar selection procedures were applied in constructing the Ontario Citizens' Assembly, the Dutch *Burgerforum*, the Irish Citizens' Assembly, and the Citizens' Assembly on Social Care in England.[74] Such procedures are imperfect. Most obviously, there is an inevitable element of self-selection: only by legally compelling people to participate could selection bias be rendered negligible, and even then some selected members may still refuse to participate. Providing members with strong incentives to participate, including paying them an honorarium, reimbursing travel costs, and minimising the amount of time commitment required, could also help to reduce any distorting effect of self-selection.[75] A further problem with sortition is that it relies on scale to successfully obtain a robust representative sample. If a mini-public only includes between 50 and 200 members, there is a danger that certain groups of individual will be under-represented or over-represented, thus undermining political equality.

However, imperfect as it is, the key point is that sortition can still generate a mini-public that "reasonably closely" mirrors the profile of the maxi-public on visible and invisible dimensions (Thompson, 2008: 42). For Stone (2016: 340), the question for institutional design is not simply about whether or not sortition should be used to select members of a democratic body, but rather: "Should we use sortition *instead of some other selection process* (original emphasis), such as voting?" Elections remain, overwhelmingly, the dominant mechanism by which political

[74] Refer to Fournier *et al.* (2011: Chapter Three) for an overview of different citizens' assembly selection procedures.
[75] Warren (2008: 59) notes that while randomly selected bodies of citizens display fewer biased demographic characteristics than electoral representation, "forms of citizen representation that rely on self-selection magnify the biases of education, income, time, and ethnicity."

representatives are selected to conventional legislatures. To most citizens, they provide an equal opportunity to express their political preferences and have them formally represented in decision-making; elections are, thus, understood to lay the foundations for representative democracy (Manin, 1997). In practice, electoral processes often undermine the principle of political equality by distorting representative outcomes. The system used to count votes and the construction of electoral units (geographical districts) can leave some citizens with a much greater probability of influencing the outcome than others (Farrell, 2011). Empirical evidence has consistently illustrated the failure of elections to deliver descriptive representation (Childs, 2008). Finally, while all citizens may theoretically possess an equal opportunity to vote, participation in the electoral process is distorted by self-selection: non-voting by large segments of the population – with unequal rates of participation across different groups – introduces systematic bias (Wichowsky, 2012). In short, weighed against the limitations of sortition, in practice, elections have much greater potential to deviate from the substantive realisation of political equality for all citizens.

On the other hand, compared to sortition, the concept of voting for political representatives is at least familiar to virtually all citizens. This baseline familiarity might contribute to the perception that elections are legitimate instruments for the selection of decision-makers. For this reason, combined with a range of political factors, some real-world mini-publics have violated the prototypical method of selecting members via sortition and instead relied on a conventional voting procedure. Most notably, members of the Icelandic Constitutional Assembly (which later became the Icelandic Constitutional Council) were selected by a national election (Bergmann, 2016). It differed from a normal legislative election in that most

candidates were lay citizens, unaffiliated with political parties. In total, 522 individuals put themselves forward, having obtained signatures from at least 30 supporters, and 25 were elected. While they included people from "a broad range of backgrounds," critics alleged that, "only previously well known individuals had been elected, mostly from the ranks of the left-leaning Reykjavik elite" (Bergmann, 2016: 22). This, together with a low level of participation from the broader electorate (turnout was just 37 percent), cast serious doubt over the representativeness of those selected and, by extension, undermined the promotion of political equality in an otherwise laudable attempt to involve ordinary citizens directly in decision-making.

The Irish Constitutional Convention (2012-2014) took a different approach to moderating the potential novelty of the concept of a mini-public by blending its design with a more conventional concept. Rather than injecting familiarity through the selection mechanism (of citizen members), it adopted a hybrid *profile* of members: two-thirds (66) were lay citizens selected at random from the Irish population; the remaining 33 members were *politicians* appointed by political parties (in proportion to their representation in the lower chamber of the legislature).[76] Suiter *et al.* (2016: 50) attribute the inclusion of politicians in the membership of the body as a way of earning "parliamentary buy-in for the process and its recommendations." However, it should be noted that in the establishment of the subsequent Irish Citizens' Assembly, the hybrid model of citizens and politicians was abandoned: all 99 members were lay citizens. The inclusion of politicians in Ireland's first deliberative mini-public may have been helpful for securing the broad endorsement of the process from political elites. Once it had been secured, a

[76] Having been allocated with a certain number of places, each political party was able to decide how its members would be appointed to the Constitutional Convention: in Fine Gael, for example, the party whip selected nominees; parliamentary representatives of the Irish Labour Party voted on which peers to select. All political appointees were serving politicians, either in the Dáil (lower house), the Seanad (upper house), or the Northern Ireland Assembly (see Suiter *et al.* 2016).

prototypical mini-public membership profile had the potential to strengthen the legitimacy of the process from the perspective of Irish citizens.

5.2.1 Hypotheses

Drawing on the preceding discussion, we can see that members of mini-publics can be selected via different mechanisms and under different categories of profile. However, mini-publics that do not consist entirely of randomly selected citizens deviate from the prototypical model. As a reasonable starting point for empirical investigation, it is hypothesised that a citizens' assembly selected by a prototypical process will be perceived to be more legitimate than alternative models featuring the election of citizens and/or the inclusion of a politician category of members. The greater the deviation from the prototypical process along these dimensions, the lower its perceived legitimacy:

H1: *Perceived legitimacy of citizens' assembly decision-making is highest under conditions of membership being exclusively citizens and citizens being selected by sortition, and lowest under conditions of membership being a mixture of citizens and politicians and citizens being selected by election.*

The normative justification is that prototypical citizens' assemblies are selected in a manner that promotes political equality. Introducing either elections or political representatives, or both, to the selection process will make it harder to achieve this goal in practice. Therefore, individuals' level of attachment to the principle of political equality should have a moderating effect on the relationship between the selection process and perceived mini-public legitimacy:

H2: *Among individuals who value political equality as a democratic principle, the perceived legitimacy of citizens' assembly decision-making will be particularly high under a prototypical selection process.*

In the context of Northern Ireland, we have already seen (in Chapter Four) that ethno-national ideology has an effect on citizens' assembly support: individuals who are ethno-nationally moderate are more likely to prefer the establishment of a citizens' assembly to elite-level talks, compared to individuals who are more strongly unionist or nationalist.[77] Since these moderate ideological preferences are traditionally under-represented by elected politicians, such views are likely to be more proportionally represented by a random sample of citizens. By extension, it is reasonable to expect that individuals' ethno-national ideology will have a moderating effect on the relationship between the mini-public selection process and perceived legitimacy. Individuals who are neither nationalist nor unionist are particularly likely to support a citizens' assembly selected with a prototypical process compared to alternatives that reinforce the status quo. Conversely, those who identify as unionist or nationalist are much less likely to support a selection process that rebalances their over-representation:

H3: *The perceived legitimacy of a citizens' assembly selected by a prototypical process will be particularly high among individuals with a moderate ethno-national position, and particularly low among those with a stronger ethno-national position.*

Finally, community background has been a very sensitive aspect of political representation in Northern Ireland. Historically, members of the traditional minority

[77] This finding refers to Model 1 in Table 4.6.

community, Catholics, experienced systematic political inequalities in an electoral process largely controlled by a political party representing the Protestant majority.[78] Generally speaking, Catholics have been more supportive of electoral reform in the direction of proportional representation, perceived to be a means of redressing historic imbalances, whereas Protestants tend to be more supportive of majoritarian or plurality-based electoral systems through which the security of their status can be better maintained (see Garry, 2016b). This may be partly linked to knowledge: since the Catholic community had direct experience of substantive political inequality, it is likely that its members will be more sensitive to the potentially inegalitarian effects of different selection mechanisms. Thus, given this historical backdrop of political inequality and its enduring legacy, Catholic citizens are particularly likely to support a mini-public selection process that is explicitly connected to political equality – the prototypical model – whereas members of the traditional majority community are much less likely to positively evaluate a process from which they may lose out, in relative terms:

H4: *The perceived legitimacy of a citizens' assembly selected by a prototypical process will be particularly high among Catholics, and particularly low among Protestants.*

[78] See Whyte (1983) for an overview of electoral inequalities.

5.3 Study One

5.3.1 Data & Method

A total of 332 adults living in Northern Ireland took part in the study. They received an email invitation as members of an online panel hosted by Opinium, a major UK survey company, and accepted the invitation to participate by clicking on a link.[79] Participants earned a small amount of credit (£0.50) for completing the survey. This relatively small non-random sample is not fully representative of the Northern Ireland population, but is diverse on relevant demographic variables.[80] Respondents were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions in a 2 x 2 design. They were presented with a description of a citizens' assembly, manipulated by the profile of decision-makers (either all citizens or an even combination of citizens and elected politicians) and the mechanism by which the citizen members are selected (via sortition or election). The four conditions are summarised in Table 5.1.

		Profile of Decision-Makers	
		Citizens only	*Mixed members*
Selection Mechanism	*Sortition*	**[1] PROTOTYPICAL** 100 citizens All randomly-selected	**[2]** 50 citizens + 50 politicians Citizens randomly-selected
	Election	**[3]** 100 citizens All elected	**[4]** 50 citizens + 50 politicians Citizens elected

Table 5.1: *Summary of experimental conditions in Study One*

[79] There are 40,000 members on Opinium's UK-wide online panel. A screening question filtered out any respondents who did not live in Northern Ireland. Participants were required to give their informed consent before proceeding to the survey.

[80] Participants were mainly male (70 percent) with a mean age of 46.9 years (*SD* = 14.47). The sample contained a roughly even distribution of Protestants (39 percent) and Catholics (38 percent), while a further 21 percent identified 'no religion' as their community background.

Each of the short vignettes provided respondents with some necessary contextual information about the concept of a citizens' assembly and why such a body might realistically be considered for political decision-making in Northern Ireland, with every effort made to keep the text as simple and concise as possible. To avoid the introduction of confounding effects around the nature of the decision, all respondents were told that the decision of the citizens' assembly would be final. The manipulated text is shown in italics (see *Appendix E* for each of the four individual vignettes):

> In Northern Ireland, there are some issues on which politicians are divided over the way forward. On these issues, it has been proposed that a [*version of a*] **citizens' assembly** could decide on the way forward instead.
>
> The citizens' assembly would consist of [{***100 ordinary members of the public***.} {***50 ordinary members of the public*** *and* ***50 elected*** *politicians.*}] [{*Members would be* ***randomly chosen*** *in the same way that legal juries are selected.* ***A random sample of 100 citizens would be a cross-section of the Northern Ireland population*** *in terms of age, gender, social class and religious and community background.*} {*Any member of the public would be able to put themselves forward to be a member.* ***They would face an election***. *Out of all members of the public who put themselves forward, the* [{50} {100}] *people with the most votes would be selected to sit on the citizens' assembly.*]
>
> [*The* ***political parties would appoint the remaining 50 members*** *– in proportion to their seats in the Northern Ireland Assembly.*]
>
> The citizens' assembly would consider the contentious issue, consider the evidence on different perspectives and different arguments, and then decide on the best way forward.
>
> The decision would be final. In other words, the government would accept in advance the decision of the citizens' assembly and agree to implement it.

Online surveys have a number of obvious advantages. They facilitate the efficient randomisation of respondents to experimental conditions, maximise the practical convenience of participation, and encourage respondents to provide honest answers to questions. These benefits are accompanied by a number of trade-offs, the most significant being the researcher's relative lack of control over the experiment itself. Participants must be trusted to read instructions and complete the tasks independent of any oversight or guidance. As such, in the present study, respondents were not able to proceed to the questions of the online survey until 30 seconds had elapsed, encouraging a baseline level of engagement with the text before asking participants for their reaction. Key elements of the manipulated variables were emphasised in bold type to reduce the cognitive complexity of the task. Two short manipulation checks were embedded in the questionnaire after the main set of response items, asking participants to identify both the profile of decision-makers in the citizens' assembly described and the mechanism by which citizen members were selected.

Immediately after reading the vignette, respondents were asked to evaluate the process described. The full wording of the base question and response options was: "Imagine the way in which a citizens' assembly would deal with a political issue. As a way of making a decision, to what extent do you think this process would be … *fair* or *unfair*; *trustworthy* or *untrustworthy*; *democratic* or *undemocratic*; *efficient* or *inefficient*; *even-handed* or *discriminatory*; *acceptable* or *unacceptable*; *good* or *bad*; *competent* or *incompetent*; *supportable* or *unsupportable*; *credible* or not *credible*?" Responses to these ten items were recorded on a seven-point scale and combined to produce a mean score of perceived legitimacy, the outcome variable.[81]

[81] For each of the ten items there were seven response options on a bipolar scale, for example: 'extremely' (fair), 'mostly' (fair), 'slightly' (fair), 'neither' (fair nor unfair), 'slightly' (unfair), 'mostly' (unfair), and 'extremely' (unfair). See *Appendix E* for the full questionnaire.

Legitimacy is, of course, a "profoundly normative concept by nature" (von Haldenwang, 2016: 1); it is also "complex and multifaceted" (Weatherford, 1992: 53). These features present a challenge for empirical measurement – to sufficiently capture the essence of the construct of legitimacy, thus ensuring content validity, while ignoring "other aspects that might be related but are outside the investigator's intent" (DeVellis, 2016: 84). The development of the multi-item scale began with a conceptual mapping exercise, identifying the "relevant content domain of the underlying construct" (*ibid*). This led to the extraction of ten relevant aspects of legitimacy from the empirical literature: a perception of *fairness* in decision-making (Tyler, 1990; Sunshine and Tyler, 2003); *trust* in the process (Miller, 1974; Sniderman, 1981; Sunshine and Tyler, 2003; Gibson *et al.* 2003), *confidence* in the process (Smith, 1981; Sunshine and Tyler, 2003); Gibson *et al.* 2003), perceived *efficiency* or value for money (Miller, 1974), perceived *competence* of decision-making (Miller, 1974), a belief that decision-makers are doing a *good job* (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 1995; Gibson *et al.* 2003), a perception of *non-discrimination* (Miller, 1974; Sunshine and Tyler, 2003; Gibson *et al.* 2003), a belief that the process is *democratic* (Schmitt, 1983), a belief that decisions should be *accepted* (Gibson, 1989; Tyler & Rasinski, 1991; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003), and a perception that the process is worthy of *support* (Tyler, 1990; Gibson *et al.* 2003).

These aspects of legitimacy are appropriate to the *object* of the measure: that is, the decision-making process of a hypothetical citizens' assembly. Other aspects of legitimacy, such as institutional loyalty (Gibson *et al.* 2003), institutional pride (Tyler, 1990; Craig *et al.* 1990; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 1995; Sunshine & Tyler 2003), lack of corruption (Miller, 1974; Sniderman, 1981), legalism (Gibson *et al.* 2003), affective support (Kornberg & Clarke, 1992; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 1995;

Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Gibson *et al.* 2003), and apolitical decision-making (Gibson, 2007) may be relevant to the perceived legitimacy of specific types of institution, such as the courts, or institutions that have existed long enough for citizens to develop affective attachments. However, these items were deemed less relevant to the object of the measure and its content domain, and thus were excluded from consideration.[82] The final ten-item scale is unidimensional and internally reliable ($\alpha = .97$).[83]

To test the hypotheses on moderating effects, the survey included questions on ethno-national ideology and community background. It also captured levels of support for the democratic value of political equality, measured on a five-point unipolar scale on which respondents indicated the extent to which they think it is important "that representation promotes political equality for everyone." The full list of questions and response categories can be found in *Appendix E*.

5.3.2 Results

Across the four experimental conditions, there are no significant differences in the extent to which respondents perceive each model of citizens' assembly to be legitimate ($F(3, 328) = 1.92$, $p = .13$). For the prototypical model, in which members are exclusively citizens who are randomly selected, the mean legitimacy is 2.91 (*SD* 1.75). As Figure 5.1 illustrates, this is not significantly higher or lower than the mean legitimacy of each of the other models described, ranging from 2.69 (*SD* 1.60) for

[82] For example, while affective support may be an important aspect underlying the legitimacy of existing political institutions, it is almost impossible to apply to a hypothetical decision-making body like a citizens' assembly (see Kornberg and Clarke, 1992; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 1995; Sunshine and Tyler, 2003; Gibson *et al.* 2003). Similarly, the perceived legalism of the decision-making process may be relevant to the legitimacy of a judicial institution like the Supreme Court of the United States, but much less relevant to the legitimacy of an explicitly political institution (see Gibson *et al.* 2003).

[83] For factor analysis and reliability statistics, refer to *Appendix F*.

the model with exclusively elected citizens to 3.30 (*SD* 1.71) for the model featuring a mixture of politicians and elected citizens. Thus, across the four conditions, the mean score of the outcome variable on its seven-point scale hovers around the midpoint (with the scale recalibrated to run from 0 to 6).

However, based on these results it is not possible to accept the null hypothesis with an adequate degree of confidence. The risk of a Type II error is high due to the low percentage of respondents passing the two manipulation checks embedded in the questionnaire; thus, it is not sufficiently clear that the manipulations themselves had no significant effect on the outcome measure. In fact, as Table 5.2 shows, only a minority of respondents correctly identified an important aspect of the manipulation in three of the conditions. The pass rates vary significantly across the four groups (χ^2 (3, N = 332) = 31.510, p < .01). It was only in the prototypical condition that a majority of respondents, 65 percent, passed the manipulation checks.

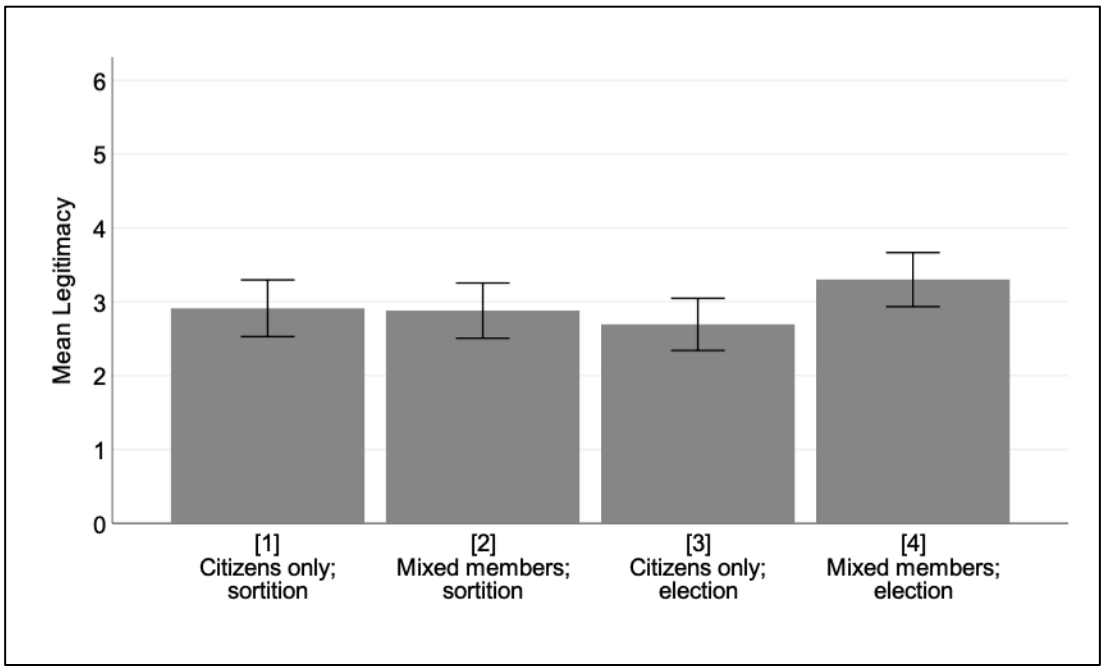


Figure 5.1: *Perceived legitimacy of decision-making by citizens' assemblies, by selection process*

	[1] Citizens only; sortition	[2] Mixed members; sortition	[3] Citizens only; election	[4] Mixed members; election	All groups
Pass	64.6	46.3	28.0	27.9	41.6
Fail	35.4	53.7	72.0	72.1	58.4
Totals	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 5.2: *Percentage distribution of respondents passing or failing manipulation checks in Study One*

It is worth recalling that the manipulation checks for this experiment consisted of two separate questions with binary response options. First, respondents were asked about the profile of the citizens' assembly described: were the members "100 ordinary members of the public," or were they "50 members of the public plus 50 politicians"? Figure 5.2 shows that a majority of respondents in each condition correctly reported the profile of citizens' assembly members. However, the variation in the distribution of correct responses across the four conditions suggests variation in the complexity associated with different models of citizens' assembly. In the two conditions describing a citizens' assembly comprising *exclusively citizens*, a large majority were able to recognise that the members were "100 ordinary members of the public." In the other conditions describing "a *version* of a citizens' assembly" (emphasis added) comprising a mixture of politicians and ordinary citizens, a significant minority of respondents failed to recognise that members would be "50 members of the public plus 50 politicians." This is not to suggest that respondents in Groups [1] and [3] were more diligent in their engagement with the stimulus material than respondents in Groups [2] and [4]; rather, it suggests that the concept of a citizens' assembly in which members are exclusively citizens is easier to process than the concept of a citizens' assembly that includes politicians.

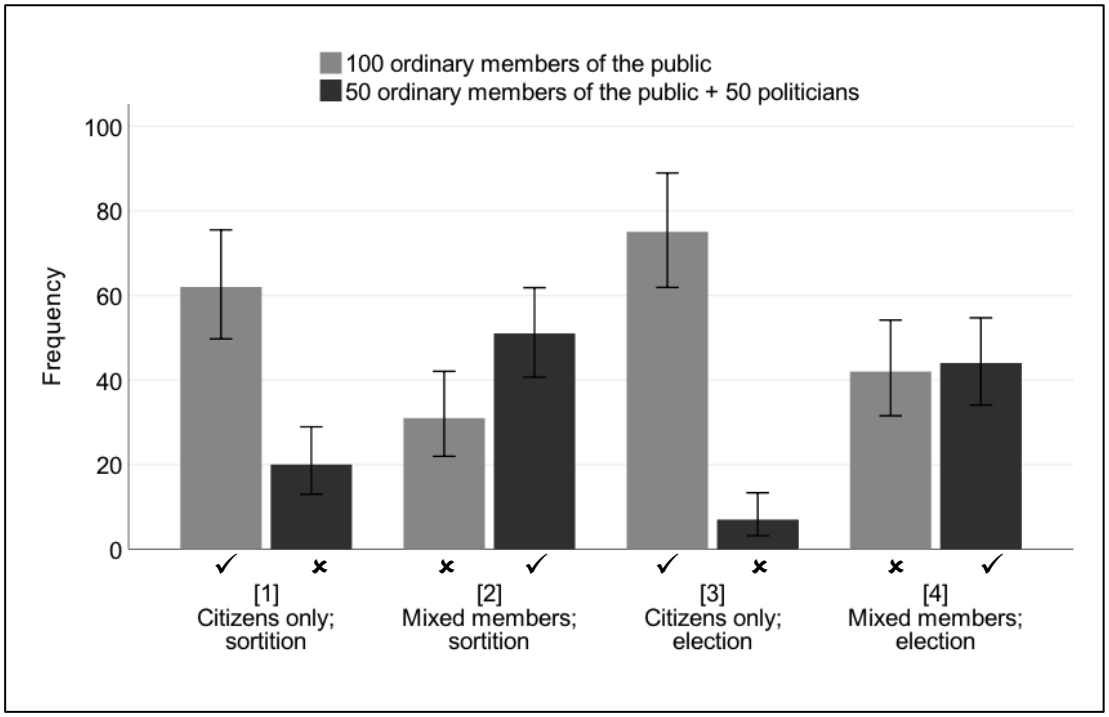


Figure 5.2: *Responses to the first manipulation check: "Who would be the members of the citizens' assembly?"*

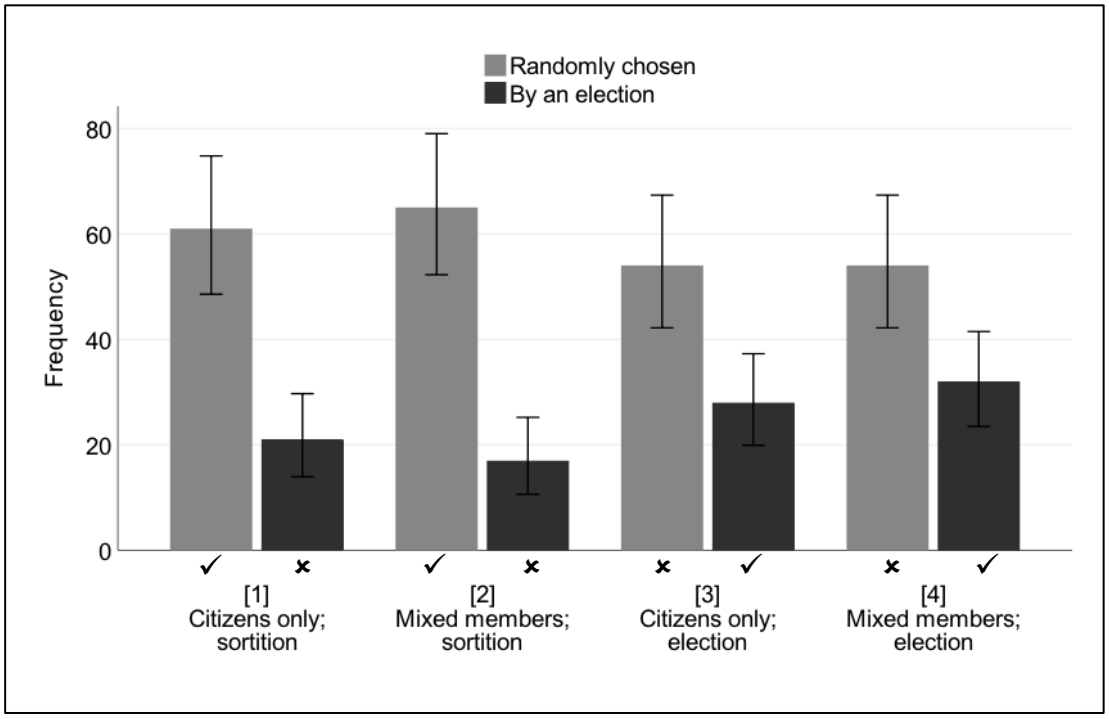


Figure 5.3: *Responses to the second manipulation check: "How would the ordinary citizens be selected?"*

Second, respondents were asked about the selection mechanism: how would the ordinary citizens be selected? Figure 5.3 shows that, across all conditions, most respondents identified that these members would be "Randomly chosen (in the same way that juries are selected)." While this was the correct response for Groups [1] and [2], this was incorrect for Groups [3] and [4]. In the latter two conditions, only a minority of respondents correctly recognised that citizens would be selected "By an election." Respondents appear to be more cognitively receptive to the concept of a citizens' assembly featuring randomly selected citizens as opposed to elected citizens. Thus, taken together, the pass rates for the two sets of manipulation checks suggest that people are more likely to recognise a citizens' assembly with a prototypical mode of selection, whereby its members are exclusively citizens who are randomly selected. Selection processes involving the election of citizen members and the appointment of politicians in a hybrid model of membership appear to be more challenging for respondents to apprehend in an online survey environment.

At this point, there are three possible responses to the results of the experiment. In the first instance, it is possible to simply accept the null hypothesis in spite of the low, and uneven, proportion of respondents failing basic manipulation checks across the experimental conditions. The risk of a Type II error is, however, excessively high. A more conservative strategy suggested by Wilson *et al.* (2010: 64) would be to "analyse the data on the basis of the responses of the participants to the manipulation check." The authors note that it is "common practice across the social sciences" to drop subjects after a post-treatment manipulation check (*ibid*). By excluding participants failing the manipulation checks, internal analysis of the data could test the original hypotheses with respect only to those successfully responding to the treatment. In this experiment, dropping responses of the participants who

failed the manipulation checks yields a significant direct effect of the treatment (see *Appendix F* for supplementary analysis). We must keep in mind the significant variation in pass rates across the conditions; in other words, the retention or dropping of cases was non-random. With two conflicting sets of conclusions, we appear to be confronted with a choice between accepting the null hypothesis (risking a Type II error) and rejecting the null hypothesis (risking a Type I error). However, a final, and more radical, strategy would be to repeat the experiment with some critical amendments to its design. Aronow *et al.* (2016: 8) "stress the importance of manipulations that are sufficiently clear so as to minimise the necessity to remove subjects based on a lack of comprehension." It is this strategy that will be pursued.

5.4 Study Two

5.4.1 Data & Method

A total of 329 adults living in Northern Ireland took part in this follow-up study. They received an email invitation to participate in a project conducted by researchers at Queen's University Belfast, as members of an online panel hosted by LucidTalk. Its panel of over 10,000 members are incentivised to take part in online surveys on a range of subjects by earning reward points that can be used to enter bi-annual prize draws. Similar to the profile of the sample in Study One, respondents were largely male (75 percent), with a healthy degree of variation on community background (42 percent Protestant, 35 percent Catholic, and 22 percent with no religion).

The experimental design replicates that of Study One, bar three significant refinements. First, in addition to reading a text-based vignette describing a model of a citizens' assembly, on the same screen (underneath the text) respondents were

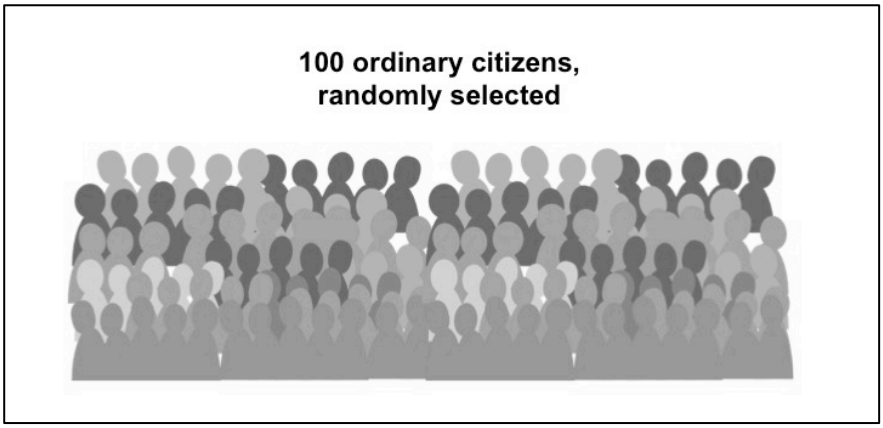
presented with an infographic summarising the manipulated selection process from each condition. The purpose of the infographics was simply to summarise and reinforce the vignettes, facilitating their comprehension. Apart from the necessary variation needed to operationalise the independent variable, the four visualisations (presented in Figure 5.4) were designed to be as simple and consistent as possible, minimising the risk of confounding effects. For example, the citizens and politicians depicted lack any specific attributes, and the colours used to distinguish the two types of citizens' assembly member lacked any obvious connotations.[84]

Second, the placement of the manipulation checks was modified. Instead of completing the manipulation checks *after* answering a series of survey items measuring the outcome variable, the manipulation checks were placed *before* all other questionnaire items – immediately after the manipulations themselves. There is a trade-off from this reordering. By requiring participants to complete manipulation checks before asking them for their subjective evaluations, there is a risk that their responses will be mediated by act of completing the task (Kidd, 1976). However, if the process of completing the checks serves to reinforce the manipulations, this should not be a disadvantage.

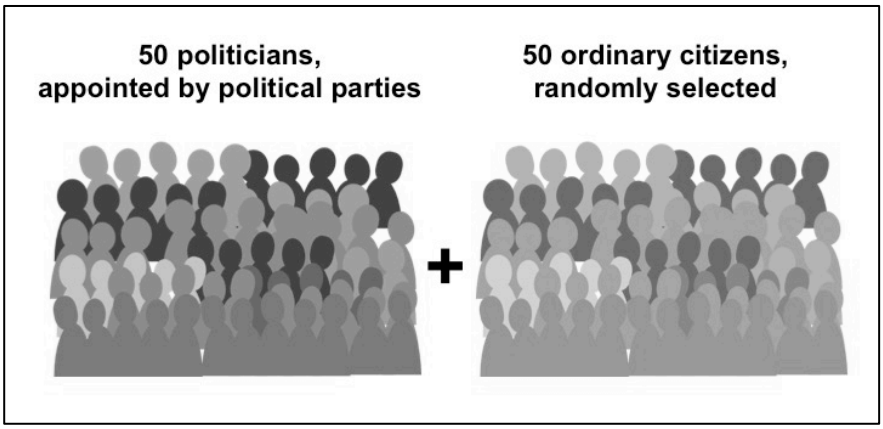
Finally, if a respondent failed to answer either of the checks correctly, he or she was prompted to review their original response(s) and invited to return to the previous page containing the stimulus. The ability to provide respondents with real-time feedback is a benefit of conducting the experiment online. After receiving the prompt, respondents could still proceed to the questionnaire, but their failure to pass the manipulation check(s) would be recorded, facilitating post hoc exclusion.

[84] In the on-screen colour version of the infographics, the animated citizens are depicted in shades of teal, while the animated politicians are depicted in shades of purple. These colours were sufficiently distinct from one another to reinforce the hybrid nature of the citizens' assembly membership in Groups [2] and [4]. These colours can also be considered politically 'neutral' in the sense that they are not likely to stimulate any connections to political preferences or political parties.

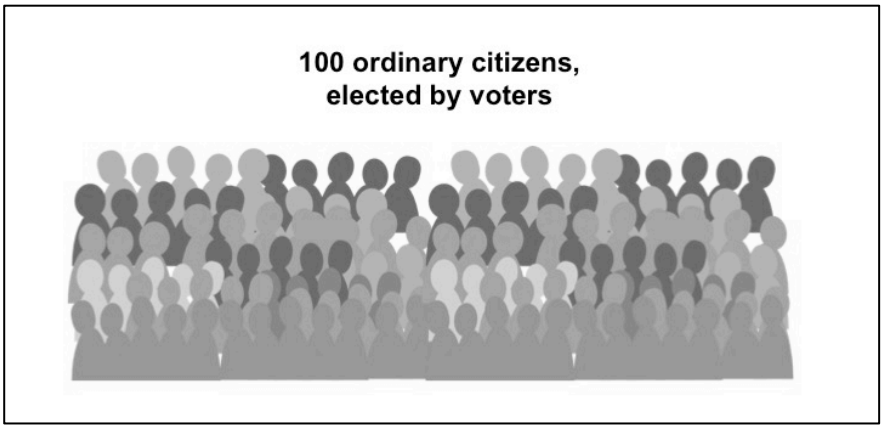
[1]



[2]



[3]



[4]

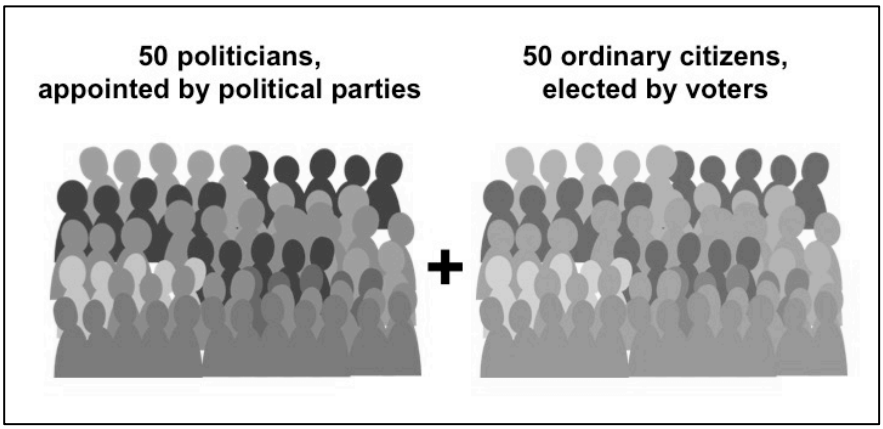


Figure 5.4: *Infographics from the four experimental conditions*

5.4.2 Results

In contrast to the experiment reported in Study One, the vast majority of respondents in this experiment passed both manipulation checks. An average of 93 percent of participants correctly identified the profile of the citizens' assembly described in each condition (see Figure 5.5). The pass rate for this check was slightly lower for group [2], in which 88 percent of respondents correctly identified a mixed profile of ordinary members of the public and politicians. An identical proportion, 93 percent of respondents, correctly identified the selection mechanism described in each condition (see Figure 5.6). In Groups [1], [2] and [4] the pass rate for this check exceeded 95 percent, but it was lower for Group [3], in which 77 percent of respondents (correctly) indicated that citizen members would be chosen by an election and 23 percent (incorrectly) stated that they would be selected by sortition.

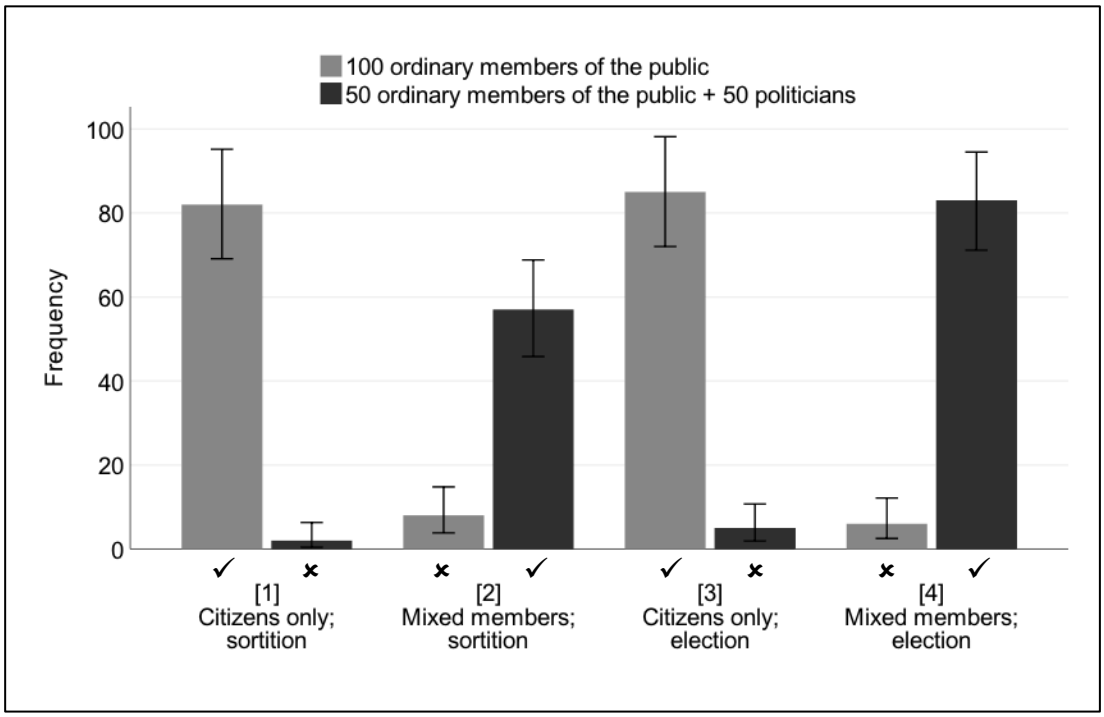


Figure 5.5: *Responses to the first manipulation check: "Who would be the members of the citizens' assembly?"*

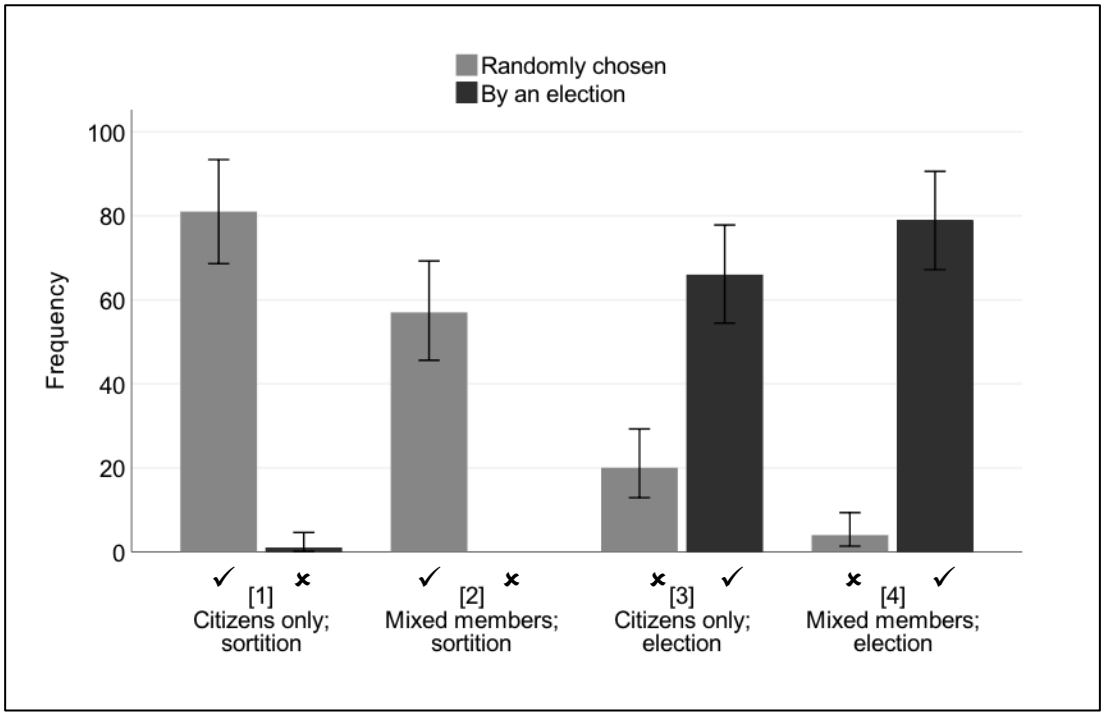


Figure 5.6: *Responses to the second manipulation check: "How would the ordinary citizens be selected?"*

The higher number of respondents in Group [3] failing to correctly identify the selection mechanism appears to reflect the nature of the citizens' assembly described in this condition. Open-ended comments left by participants suggest that, despite being prompted about their incorrect answer, many persisted with their response that members would be randomly chosen – not elected – because this is how they thought citizens *should* be selected. These participants ignored the wording of the question, which asked how members of the citizens' assembly "would" be selected, not how they ought to be chosen. Their responses appear to have been based on their subjective preferences for the design of a citizens' assembly, not the selection mechanism specified in the treatment. Therefore, only the 283 respondents who passed both manipulation checks are included in the analysis that follows.[85]

[85] See *Appendix G* for an alternative analysis that includes all respondents. The substantive results remain broadly constant.

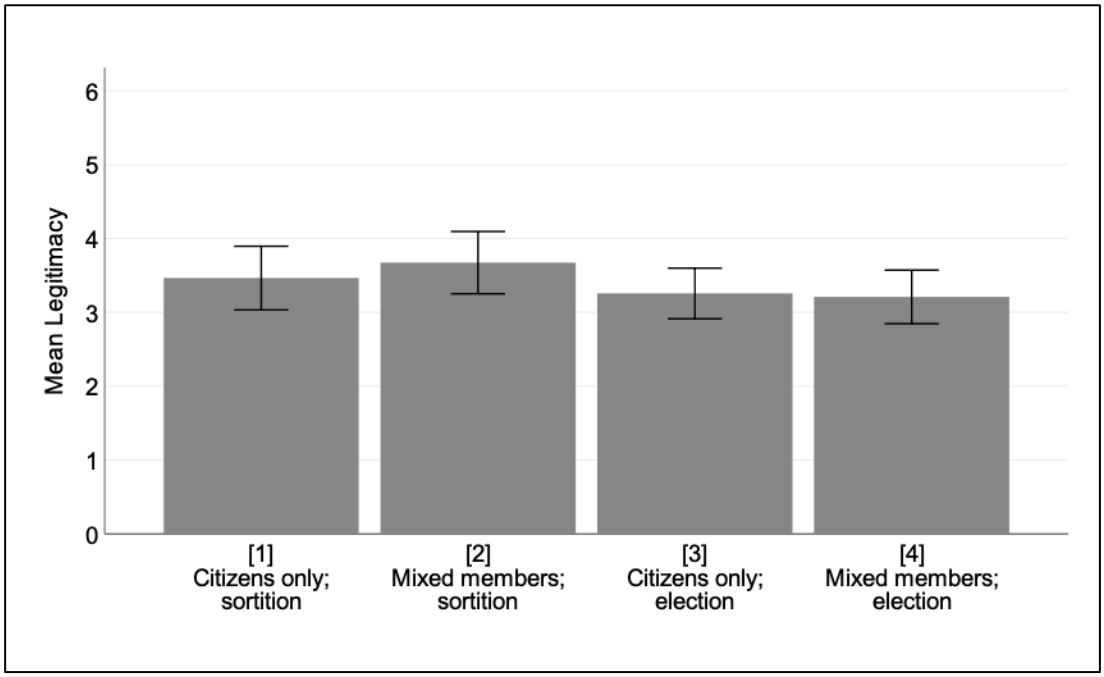


Figure 5.7: *Mean legitimacy scores of each model of citizens' assembly*

Figure 5.7 shows little difference in the mean legitimacy scores across the four conditions. The two sortition-based models, both with citizens only (M = 3.66, SD = 1.95) and mixed members (M = 3.67, SD = 1.59), were perceived as marginally more legitimate than the two election-based counterparts consisting of citizens only (M = 3.26, SD = 1.38) and mixed members (M = 3.21, SD = 1.62). However, overall, there is no significant direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable ($F(3, 278) = 1.05$, $p = .37$). A citizens' assembly with a prototypical selection mechanism, sortition, and a prototypical profile of its membership, exclusively members of the public, is regarded as equally legitimate as the alternative models described. Thus, H1 is rejected. In the absence of a direct effect, however, we do observe striking moderating effects in the relationship between the design of the selection process of a citizens' assembly and perceptions of its legitimacy. Each moderating effect is formally tested by regression analysis, reported in *Appendix F*.

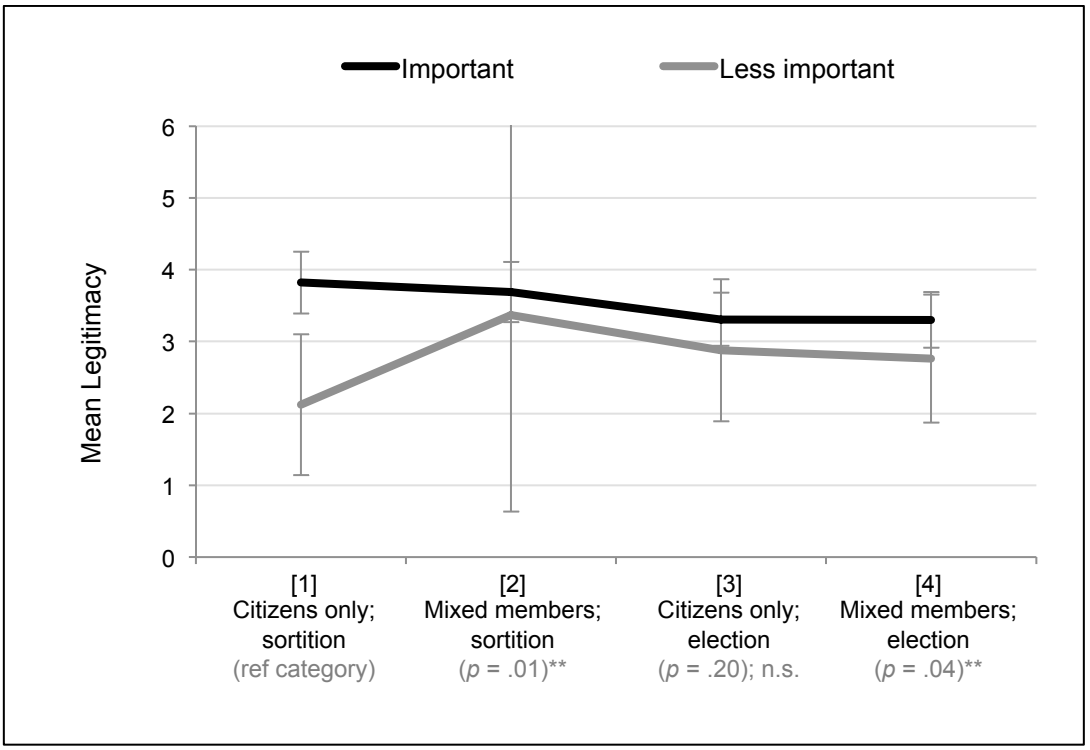


Figure 5.8: *Mean legitimacy scores of each model of citizens' assembly, by perceived importance of political equality (with p-values for moderating effects)*

Respondents were asked to consider the extent to which democratic representation should be connected to the principle of political equality.[86] Among those who think it is 'mostly' or 'very' important for representation to promote political equality, which amounts to a significant majority of respondents, a citizens' assembly with a prototypical selection process was perceived to be the most legitimate model (M = 3.82, SD = 1.77). This is consistent with our expectation that the normative justification for the random selection of citizens as decision-makers – the promotion of political equality – would translate into empirical support among individuals already committed to this normative principle. Figure 5.8 shows how perceived legitimacy steadily declines when elections and politicians enter the selection process and, arguably, political equality becomes harder to deliver. Among those

[86] The distribution of responses is, unexpectedly, skewed. 15 percent of respondents reported that it was 'not at all', 'not very' or only 'somewhat' important that representation should promote political equality for everyone; 85 percent said it was 'mostly' or 'very' important.

who value political equality, the citizens' assembly with the lowest legitimacy score is the model deviating the furthest from the prototypical selection process (M = 3.29, SD = 1.62). In contrast, among those who regard political equality as being less important, the prototypical model is seen as the least legitimate (M = 2.12, SD = 2.07). The moderating effect of political equality is significant across these two contrasting models, providing support for H2.[87] For individuals who do not attach much importance to political equality, the particularly low level of legitimacy ascribed to a citizens' assembly consisting purely of randomly selected citizens may well stem from their relative disregard for the very principle on which this prototypical selection process rests.

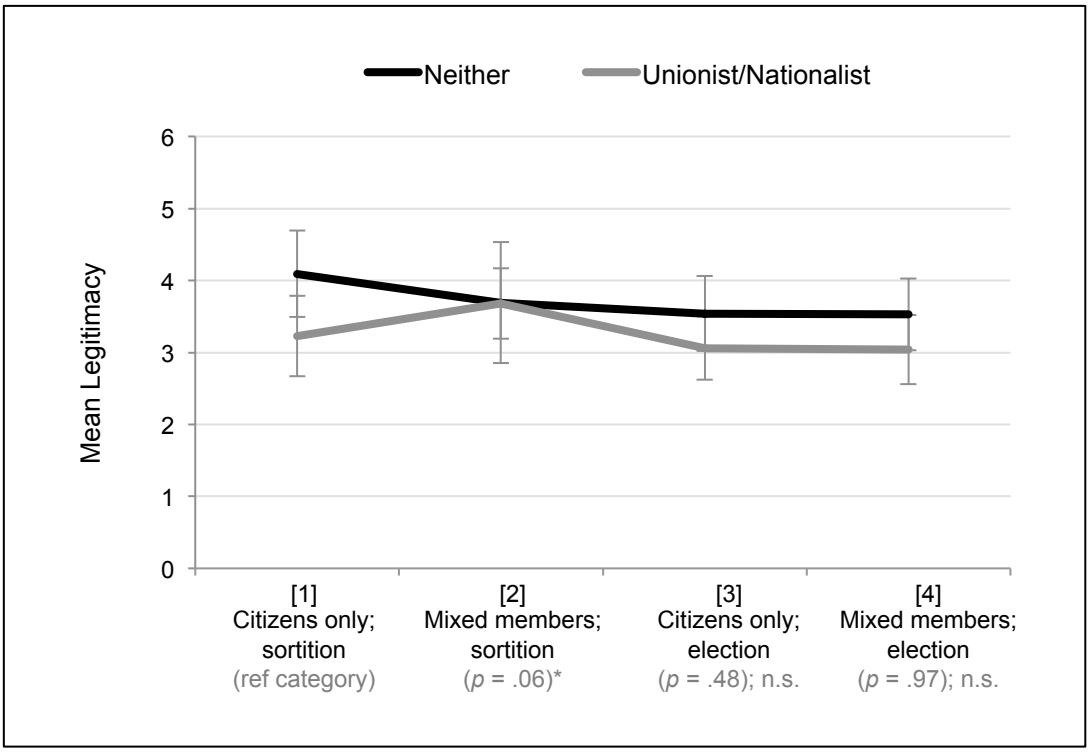


Figure 5.9: *Mean legitimacy scores of each model of citizens' assembly, by ethno-national ideology (with p-values for moderating effects)*

[87] Taking the prototypical model (Group [1]) as the reference category, respondents' perceived importance of political equality is a significant moderator ($p < .05$) across Groups [2] and [4].

Ethno-nationalism also has a moderating effect on the perceived legitimacy of citizens' assemblies with different selection processes (see Figure 5.9). Among those identifying as neither nationalist nor unionist, a body consisting exclusively of randomly-selected citizens was perceived as the most legitimate model (M = 4.09, SD = 1.53), while the model featuring a mixed membership of politicians and elected citizens received the lowest score (M = 3.53, SD = 1.31). By contrast, respondents identifying as unionist or nationalist perceived the model with the prototypical selection process to be less legitimate, on average, by nearly one unit (M = 3.23, SD = 2.04). For them, the most legitimate model featured sortition and a mixed profile (M = 3.68, SD = 1.60). Compared to the prototypical condition, the magnitude of the difference in effect size across different levels of ethno-national ideology was only statistically significant with respect to this condition, thus only partly confirming H3.

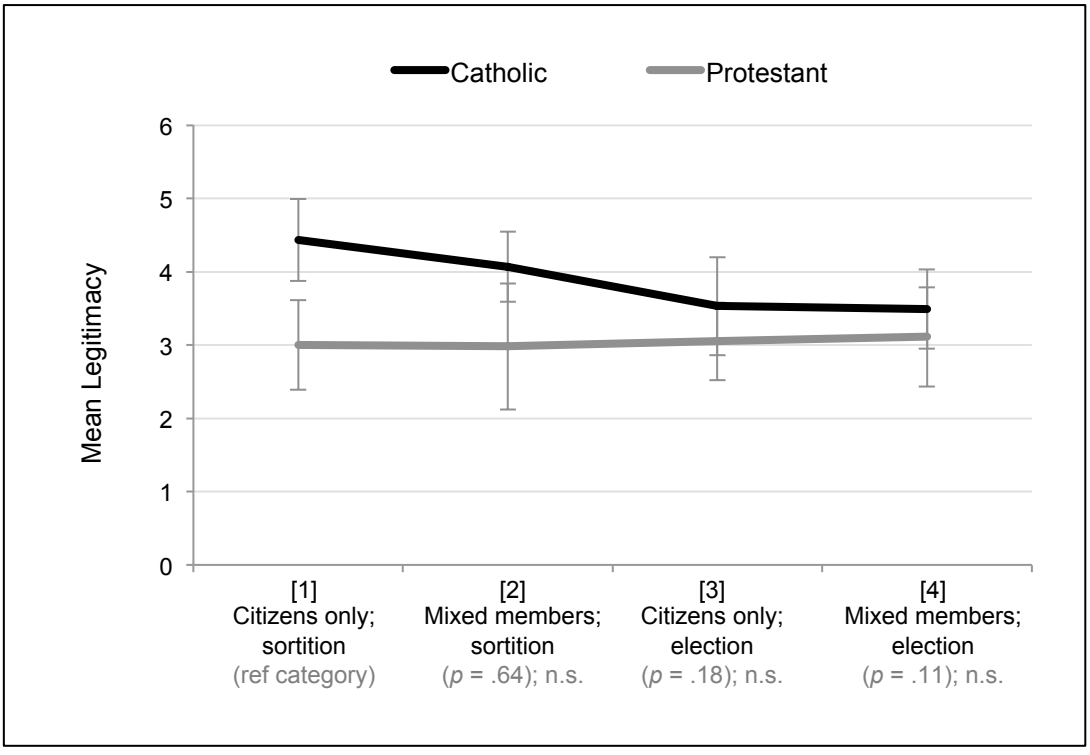


Figure 5.10: *Mean legitimacy scores of each model of citizens' assembly, by community background (with* p*-values for moderating effects)*

Figure 5.10 presents the mean legitimacy scores for each experimental condition by community background. Protestant respondents perceived each version of citizens' assembly to be equally legitimate, with each mean score positioned more or less on the midpoint of the scale. Catholic respondents perceive the prototypical model to be the most legitimate (M = 4.43, SD = 1.18) and the model deviating most from the prototypical selection process to be the least legitimate (M = 3.49, SD = 1.59). However, the differences in the magnitude of the effect sizes for Catholic and Protestant respondents are statistically insignificant across all conditions.[88] Thus, H4 is rejected.

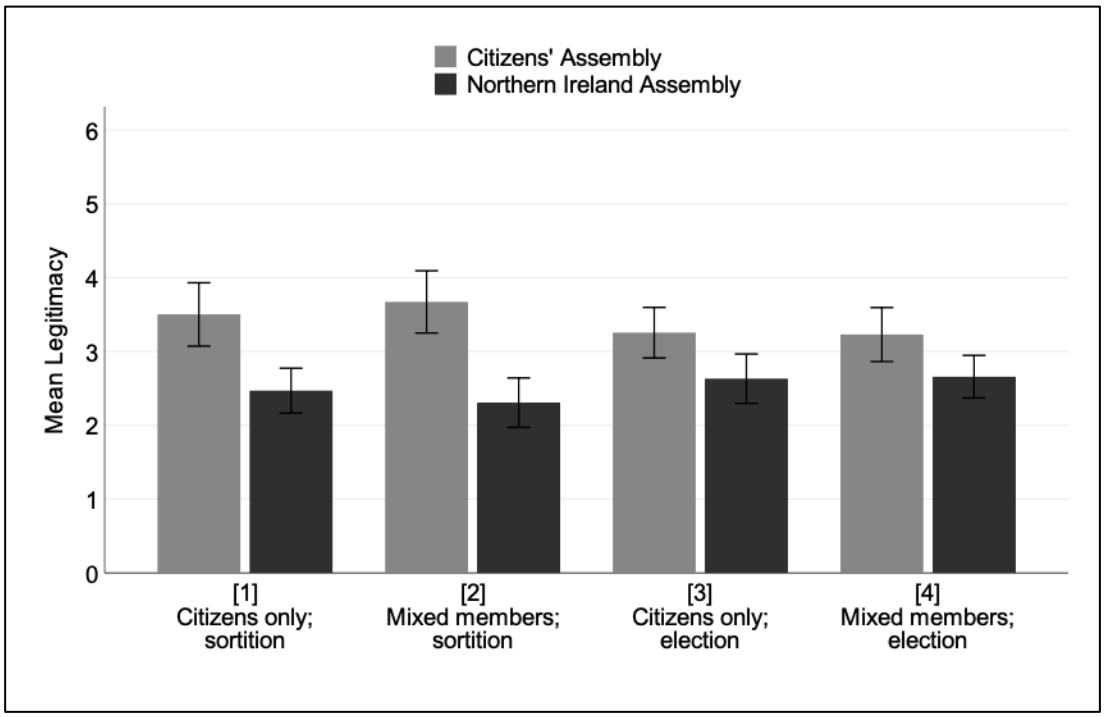


Figure 5.11: *Mean legitimacy scores of each model of citizens' assembly compared to mean legitimacy scores for the Northern Ireland Assembly*

[88] The statistically insignificant differences may stem from the reduced sample size: the 22 percent of respondents identifying with neither community were excluded from this analysis, with a negative effect on statistical power.

Finally, as a check on the robustness of respondents' perceptions of (hypothetical) citizens' assembly decision-making, all were asked to imagine the way in which the (real-world) Northern Ireland Assembly makes decisions – that is, when it is functioning normally.[89] They evaluated the Northern Ireland Assembly's decision-making according to the same ten items on which they had evaluated legitimacy of each respective version of citizens' assembly. In all four conditions, the mean legitimacy score for decision-making by the Northern Ireland Assembly is lower than the mean score for each model of citizens' assembly. Therefore, while neither the profile of citizens' assembly members nor the selection method of citizen members had a direct effect on the perceived legitimacy of citizens' assembly decision-making, Figure 5.11 demonstrates that respondents are far from indifferent to different types of decision-making process. Compared to their evaluation of the Northern Ireland Assembly, respondents are, on average, favourably disposed to decision-making by citizens' assemblies selected in different ways.

5.5 Discussion & Conclusion

The process by which mini-publics are selected is a defining feature of these democratic innovations. Under a prototypical model of citizens' assembly, all members are 'ordinary' citizens who are selected at random from the maxi-public. The profile of decision-makers – lay citizens, as opposed to professional politicians – and the mechanism used to select them – sortition, as opposed to election – both help to promote the democratic principle of political equality. In theory, everyone is

[89] At the time of the experiment in March 2018, the Northern Ireland Assembly had not been functioning for over a year. It collapsed along with the Northern Ireland Executive in January 2017. Even by explicitly asking respondents to ground their evaluations of the Assembly while it was operating normally, rather than on the basis of its post-collapse state of dormancy, evaluations may be negatively affected.

capable of participating in decision-making, and everyone stands an equal chance of being selected to do so in a formalised citizens' assembly. And yet these two dimensions of mini-public selection remain conceptually novel to most people. For this reason, designers of mini-publics may wish to retain more conventional features of existing democratic institutions, such as selecting lay citizen members via an electoral process, or by engineering a membership profile that includes both lay citizens and professional politicians. The results of this chapter suggest that, overall, these deviations from a prototypical selection process make no difference to the perceived legitimacy of a citizens' assembly. A citizens' assembly in which members are all randomly selected citizens is regarded as equally legitimate as one in which citizens are elected, and one in which members are evenly split between professional politicians and lay citizens – either elected or randomly selected.

This finding endows practitioners with a certain degree of flexibility in the design of mini-public selection procedures, commensurate to contextual demands. If, for example, a government commissions a citizens' assembly in the face of wider scepticism among political elites, the inclusion of politicians as members of the body themselves – with all political parties proportionally represented – may help to secure the endorsement of the process and its outcomes from the political establishment. Such a scenario is imaginable in Northern Ireland, where there is an uneven degree of enthusiasm for the concept of a citizens' assembly among political parties; unionist politicians have been somewhat wary of the idea (Donnelly, 2015). However, while this hybrid membership configuration certainly helped to generate 'buy-in' from political parties in the Irish context (Suiter *et al.* 2016), it does risk changing the dynamic within the citizens' assembly itself, particularly if partisan divisions contributed to the perceived need for a citizens' assembly in the first place.

Meanwhile, if sortition were deemed by the commissioning body to be too radical a departure from conventional selection mechanisms, then members could be selected by an election without undermining public perceptions of the mini-public's legitimacy, all else equal. However, this dimension of selection is perhaps more sensitive to external variables. Sortition, by definition, produces a predictable outcome: a sample of the population that is representative on certain parameters to within a recognised (but low) margin of error. In other words, if a random sampling procedure is implemented rigorously and transparently, the outcome is purely a function of this mathematical procedure. Elections also have many predictable qualities, but such predictability relies on political parties providing structure to competition between candidates. Without parties to provide a sense of order, the process of selecting fellow citizens may become too complicated for voters to feel like they can meaningfully engage. Indeed, it is noteworthy that in the manipulation checks for Study One, a majority of respondents reported that citizens' assembly members in *all* experimental conditions were randomly selected – including a majority of respondents in the two conditions featuring *elected* citizen members. This in itself suggests that the idea of electing ordinary people to a mini-public may produce greater confusion rather than a sense of procedural familiarity. Or, to put it another way, the idea of randomly selecting citizens' assembly members actually appears to be more intuitive to many people than might have been expected.

The experience of Iceland illustrates how such a selection mechanism may indeed make life difficult for the maxi-public in practice. The election of lay citizens to the Icelandic Constitutional Convention suffered from a lack of popular engagement with the campaign; weak turnout was likely the result of voters being overwhelmed by the task of choosing between 522 candidates and the media simply

being unable to cover each of them adequately. The Supreme Court ended up invalidating the election, delivering "an almost fatal blow to the whole process" (Bergmann, 2016: 23). On the face of it, while deviations from the prototypical model of citizens' assembly selection may not come at a cost to the body's perceived legitimacy as far as the citizens not selected are concerned, the potentially unruly process of electing lay citizens may unwittingly damage the integrity of the process. To put it bluntly, the nature of an election envisaged by respondents in an experiment (even when they correctly recognise the electoral selection mechanism) may be vastly different to reality, which, in turn, may undermine retrospective perceptions of the legitimacy of the process.

Besides questions of practicality and political expediency, the design of a process for selecting members of a citizens' assembly should also be informed by an underlying democratic rationale. The individual-level results of the experiment in Study Two provide clear evidence that a prototypical selection process is positively associated with the promotion of political equality. It is possible that respondents were positively primed by the vignette wording. For example, for the prototypical condition respondents were told that, "A random sample of 100 citizens would be a cross-section of the Northern Ireland population in terms of age, gender, social class and religious and community background." They were also told that this selection mechanism was similar to the way legal juries are chosen. These pieces of information, addressing another application of the mechanism and its effects, may have played a role in convincing respondents that it would indeed be a legitimate way of selecting members of a mini-public. However, they are both objective statements of empirical reality. In the absence of such (minimal) contextual detail, it is unlikely that respondents would be familiar with the operation of sortition and its

basic effect of generating a representative sample of the wider population. A further study would be useful to investigate people's baseline awareness of the principles underlying random selection, disaggregating the specific elements that are related to its perceived promotion of political equality, and how these differ from key elements of an electoral method of selection.

In many respects, the key point of mini-publics is precisely to be different to other elements of the political system – not to present a challenge to other processes and institutions, but to help the overall system to function better. From this perspective, the moderating effect of ethno-national ideology offers encouraging potential for the application of citizens' assemblies to deeply divided places. Individuals who are ethno-nationally moderate, and whose political priorities may not be adequately captured by Northern Ireland's party system that remains dominated by the ethno-national dimension, perceive a citizens' assembly with a prototypical selection process to be particularly legitimate. Presumably, these individuals see greater opportunity for their political preferences to be expressed through a representative sample of ordinary citizens compared to alternative processes featuring elections and political representatives.

It is particularly important to note that among individuals with stronger ethno-national views, it is not the case that they perceived a prototypical model to be considerably less legitimate; rather, the moderating effect of ethno-national ideology appears principally to be driven by the particularly positive evaluations of this model among those with moderate ethno-national views. For most of the other experimental conditions, differences in the intensity of ethno-national ideology had no significant moderating effect on perceived legitimacy. This suggests that establishing a citizens' assembly through the random selection of ordinary citizens has the potential to

enhance the democratic quality of decision-making from the perspective of individuals who are neither nationalist nor unionist, without risking the widespread alienation individuals who identify as either unionist or nationalist. Moreover, despite historical sensitivities over political representation in Northern Ireland, community background has no significant moderating effect at all on the relationship between a mini-public's selection process and its perceived legitimacy. This may be explained by demographic change over recent decades that has seen the Protestant and Catholic communities becoming more equal in size. As far as the prototypical model of citizens' assembly is concerned, as well as the alternative possibilities considered in this chapter, this null effect suggests that neither community will consider itself advantaged – or disadvantaged – by the selection process.

If the motivation behind establishing a citizens' assembly is to try and control a democratic deficit, by virtue of its selection procedure promoting the democratic principle of political equality in a way that other institutions do not, there are compelling reasons to adopt a prototypical model, even in a deeply divided place. And yet, decision-making by *each* of the four models of citizens' assembly considered in this analysis was consistently perceived to be more legitimate than decision-making by the Northern Ireland Assembly. Regardless of variation in the design of their selection processes, this finding in itself highlights the positive potential for democratic deficits to be reduced by involving ordinary citizens in decision-making. However, the selection of citizens' assembly members is of course just one aspect of their design. The next chapter examines the potential effect of how the subsequent stage of the process is designed. Once members of a citizens' assembly have been selected, does the way in which they go on to make decisions have an effect on the perceived legitimacy of the body?

Chapter Six

THE PROCESS OF MAKING DECISIONS

LEGITIMACY AT THE THROUGHPUT STAGE OF MINI-PUBLIC DECISION-MAKING

> *Mission Control*: And, 13, this is Houston. I've got another procedure for the LM . A short one.
>
> *Apollo 13*: Okay. Ready to copy, Jack.
>
> Radio communication between Mission Control and Apollo 13 Lunar Module Pilot Fred Haise, 13 April 1970 (NASA, 1970: 181)

For most deliberative democrats, the mere gathering of citizens in a mini-public is a necessary but far from sufficient condition for the body's claim to democratic legitimacy. It is what the sample of citizens *do* when gathered that elevates a mini-public to a *deliberative* mini-public. As Fishkin (1991: 36) puts it, political equality without deliberation is of little benefit, "for it amounts to nothing more than power without the opportunity to think about how that power ought to be exercised." Members of a mini-public must be presented with sufficient information on the issue in question, they must encounter a full range of relevant arguments and perspectives, and they must have the opportunity to weigh up the evidence before reaching any collective decision.

The normative justifications for promoting deliberation in decision-making are extensive and, by their nature, they cannot be falsified: deliberation is either a principle of democratic decision-making or it is not. It is the role of empirical research to investigate whether the central claims of deliberative theory are delivered in practice. In the first instance, from the perspective of the maxi-public, does the presence of deliberation in mini-public decision-making enhance the perceived legitimacy of the process? And, if so, are there ways of designing a deliberative process that enhances or diminishes the extent to which it is perceived as legitimate? This chapter probes these two questions. The results of a randomised experiment suggest that as long as the members of a citizens' assembly are provided with comprehensive and balanced information on an issue, a formal deliberation phase, operationalised either as (external) face-to-face discussion or as (internal) imagined conversation, makes no significant difference to the perceived legitimacy of decision-making. Variation in attitudes at the individual-level, across different levels of ethno-national ideological intensity and the perceived importance of deliberation, indicates that the design of a deliberative decision-making process should reflect the context and purpose of the mini-public.

6.1 Promoting Deliberation

By deliberation, Fishkin (2009: 33) refers to "the process by which individuals sincerely weigh the merits of competing arguments in discussions together." The goal of such a process is to arrive at "views that represent collective, informed consent" (*ibid*: 34). For some theorists, it should be acknowledged, deliberation is not simply a process but a worthy goal in its own right; it does not need to be

instrumental to the fulfilment of a broader purpose. However, when deliberation is oriented towards a collective good – the making of public policy decisions – it is typically understood to offer "a means to a more considered, reasoned decision," rather than being treated as an end in itself (Goodin and Niemeyer, 2003: 629). For decision-makers to be sincerely guided by deliberation, participants must be open to persuasion based on the strength of competing arguments, prepared to consider broader interests beyond their own, and willing to potentially revise their initial preferences on the basis of new evidence. At their core, deliberative decisions are those reached through 'the unforced force of the better argument' (Habermas, 1996).

Such a decision-making process stands in contrast to those guided by partisanship, self-interest and fixed preferences. Real-world processes involving elected representatives often fall short of deliberative ideals. When legislative voting is driven by partisan calculations, politicians are placing party loyalty over a genuine attempt to engage in objective reasoning. Parliamentary and congressional debates offer the opportunity for representatives to argue in favour of a particular position, but empirical evidence suggests they primarily do so in order to assert their position, without the intention of persuading others or being open to persuasion themselves (Mucciaroni and Quirk, 2006). Similarly, at the executive level of decision-making, coalition governments (and, perhaps less obviously, single-party administrations) are characterised by negotiations, both in the formation and in the day-to-day execution of a programme for government. Political parties enter government, quite reasonably, seeking to implement a particular agenda that serves the interests of the people who voted for them. Their electoral strength determines their relative bargaining power in any political horse-trading. Just as partisanship may obstruct meaningful deliberation in the legislative process, the logic of negotiation can also

blind decision-makers to the force of the better argument. Negotiators enter the process with fixed preferences and defend them to the extent that their bargaining power allows, often without the incentive to reflect on the relative merit of holding these preferences to begin with. Efforts to negotiate compromise outcomes serve as a tool for maximising sectional interests, as distinct from an effort to consider outcomes that best serve a common interest.[90] In short, while decision-making on the basis of partisanship and/or negotiation may serve a range of political purposes, such decision-making stands in tension with the basic principles of deliberation.

What, exactly, are these principles? There is certainly a degree of variation within deliberative theory itself, but Fishkin's (2009) criteria broadly encapsulate the key features of deliberation identified in the literature.[91] He argues that the quality of a deliberative process can be evaluated according to five conditions: participants' access to relevant information, the substantive balance of arguments, the diversity of positions held by participants in group interactions, the conscientiousness of participants in decision-making, and the extent to which arguments are given equal consideration on their merits. Taken together, these five conditions signify that deliberation is essentially about the quality of information provided to participants and the manner in which participants assess it and respond to it. The relative latitude of the criteria leaves open a range of possible configurations for the practical design of a deliberative process in a mini-public.

[90] Participants may ultimately make a decision on the basis of their own personal values or interests, or those of a particular group (see Fishkin, 1991: 37). Some deliberative theorists explicitly emphasise the promotion of the common good in decision-making (see Bächtiger *et al.* 2018). Others see this as possible, even desirable, but not strictly necessary: what is important is that participants are presented with the full range of information and arguments, allowing them to at least *consider* information and perspectives beyond their own initial horizon.

[91] See Bächtiger *et al.* (2018) for a more comprehensive overview of the principles underpinning deliberation.

6.2 Making Decisions in a Mini-Public

Mini-public decision-making is typically structured around a number of distinct phases (see Fournier *et al.* 2011). Participants first have the opportunity to *learn* about the issue at stake, receiving background information and viewpoints from a combination of impartial experts, advocates of a certain position, and members of the broader public in plenary sessions and consultations. It is only after becoming familiar with the different aspects of an issue that members of the mini-public are in a position to begin *deliberating* what to do about it. In every citizens' assembly that has been held, the deliberation phase has been operationalised through roundtable discussions in which members sit in small groups (of usually no more than ten participants) and engage in structured dialogue, facilitated by trained professionals.[92] For many deliberative democrats, this mutual exchange of participants' perspectives through active listening and talking is a venerable part of the process (Polletta and Gharrity Gardner, 2018; Morrell, 2018).

However, deliberation and verbal discussion are not synonymous. While Fishkin's (2009: 33) definition refers to "the process by which individuals sincerely weigh the merits of competing arguments *in discussions together*" (emphasis added), such discussions may not necessarily demand face-to-face interaction. Indeed, if we take Fishkin's (2009: 34) *goal* of deliberation as reaching "views that represent collective, informed consent," and if we evaluate this process according to the five conditions he specifies, there is no explicit requirement that deliberation centres on interactive acts of talking and listening to one another. Indeed, the modern term derives from the Latin '*deliberatus*', translated as 'considered carefully'. Its roots are

[92] Intermediaries may fulfill different roles, depending on the purpose and structure of the deliberative forum. See Landwehr (2014) for a discussion of these roles, and see Gerber (2015) for a discussion of the impact of different kinds of facilitation on participants.

'*librare*' (to weigh) and '*de-*' (down), reflecting an early understanding of deliberation as a process of contemplating different options, as if comparatively weighing them on a set of scales (see Steiner, 2012: 4). In this narrow sense, deliberation at the very least demands an individual to *think* for himself or herself. Talking and listening to other individuals directly may enhance and refine his or her independent thinking, but such interaction would be in addition to the fundamental requirement of deliberation. Put another way, deliberation without conversation is possible, but deliberation without thinking is impossible.

Accordingly, Dryzek (2000) prefers the term 'discursive democracy' over 'deliberative democracy' precisely because he recognises that deliberation can be a personal rather than a social decision-making process. Even in explicitly collective modes of decision-making, where individuals weigh up different courses of action in conversation with one another, Goodin (2000: 81) argues that deliberation "must inevitably be done within each individual's head" both before and during an interpersonal exchange of ideas and reasons. He refers to this "internal-reflective" aspect of decision-making as "deliberation within" (*ibid*: 92). In an empirical study of a citizens' jury, Goodin and Niemeyer (2003: 635) found that while many deliberative democrats "would have us privilege conversation over cognition as politically the most important mode of deliberation," the effect of individuals internally reflecting on information – before discussing it with others – had a much greater effect on opinion formation than external discussion. It is one thing to shift the relative emphasis of deliberation from external to internal processes, but it is another to suggest that deliberation, at least in a mini-public environment, should be conducted purely internally among participants.

The rationale for the exclusive promotion of internal deliberation in citizens' assemblies falls into four broad categories. First, there is the issue of statistical inference. If the purpose of a deliberative mini-public is to find out what the maxi-public *would* decide under ideal conditions (i.e. the careful consideration of all relevant information and arguments), then the decision-making process should generate outcomes that are replicable and generalisable. Such a claim about the decision(s) of a mini-public rests on a core statistical assumption: that the sample is representative of the broader population. However, the representativeness of the sample is compromised as soon as the (initially independent) participants interact with one another and have the opportunity to influence each other in unique ways. As Goodin (2000: 88-89) puts it, the challenge for mini-public design "lies in ensuring the *continuing* representativeness of the subset, once the deliberation gets underway … (since) it beggars belief that any one group would come to exactly the same conclusions by exactly the same route as any other" (original emphasis). Thus, if participants each responded to a comprehensive and identical set of evidence by a process of internal deliberation – without interacting with one another – they would at least maintain their statistical independence and the generalisability of the sample's aggregate decision(s).[93]

A second reason is that there are some sensitive contexts in which face-to-face discussion could prove problematic. Allport (1954) argued that inter-group contact has the potential to reduce prejudice between different groups, but, crucially, this effect is dependent on a set of favourable conditions, including equal status among groups, the possession of common goals, the absence of inter-group

[93] Even though the initially representative sample would still become unrepresentative once participants were provided with information to stimulate internal deliberation, the idea is that by maintaining consistency in the information provided and the instructions given to each participant, the process can be replicated in a way not possible with face-to-face deliberation.

competition, support for political authorities, and personal interaction.[94] This hypothesis has been consistently validated (see, for example, Pettigrew, 1998). Without the attainment of necessary conditions, however, contact between individuals of rival groups can stimulate *higher* levels of mutual prejudice and undermine relations between them (Paolini *et al.* 2010). Experiments have demonstrated both the limits of positive contact, such as when groups possess unequal status (Henry and Hardin, 2006; Al Ramiah and Hewstone, 2013), as well as the prejudice-inducing effect of negative contact (Barlow *et al.* 2012; Graf *et al.* 2014). For meaningful deliberation to occur among a diverse group of individuals in a deeply divided polity, the avoidance of interpersonal contact may be desirable – at least when the conditions conducive to positive contact are tenuous or unattainable.

Third, beyond the political sensitivities of a deeply divided place, it may not always be practical or efficient for members of a mini-public to physically assemble in a single location (Gastil, 2000). For geographically large polities, as well as for mini-publics set up to address issues that transcend national borders, a face-to-face meeting of participants may be prohibitively expensive if members of the sample are each required to travel great distances to the venue. The use of mini-publics at the global level of decision-making has been suggested, particularly to consider transnational environmental issues (Baber and Bartlett, 2009), and yet the physical assembly of participants may in itself be environmentally harmful and unnecessary. Even if the target population resides in a relatively small geographical unit, and even if the issue(s) to be examined by the mini-public pertains only to that jurisdiction, the complexity of the issue(s) could render it necessary to spread the work of the mini-public over a long period of time, or perhaps participants do not even share the same

[94] See Pettigrew and Tropp (2008) for an overview of the history and influence of Allport's inter-group contact hypothesis.

language.[95] Under such circumstances, internal deliberation by individual participants could overcome the potential practical difficulties of physical assembly and interaction.

Finally, real-world deliberative bodies have illustrated the potential for participants to meaningfully engage in internal over external deliberation. While Ancient Athens is often heralded as an early example of deliberative democracy in action, recent research casts doubt that citizens did very much talking. In a critical semantic analysis, Cammack (2013: 125) concludes that "'deliberative' is not an appropriate label for Athenian democracy, unless 'deliberation' in the exclusively 'internal-reflective' sense is meant." She challenges the conventional assumption that the Greek verb '*bouleuomai*' connotes external discussion among all decision-makers. Instead, by cross-referencing the verb's usage in other texts, including instances where it is used alongside words unequivocally associated with speech, Cammack finds a division of labour in Athenian decision-making: between speakers and listeners (see also Landauer, 2012). A small number of citizens had the role of providing oral advice to the *ekklēsia* (assembly), but the vast majority had the role of *listening* and reflecting on the speeches before individually casting a vote. From a practical standpoint, this made sense. With approximately six thousand citizens typically present at a single meeting of the assembly (Hansen, 1999), the size of the gathering "prohibited public conversation of the kind imagined by many modern scholars" (Cammack, 2013: 129). Through the precedent created by these early forms of democracy, deliberation can be understood primarily as a process of internal reflection.

[95] Dryzek (2009) cites a shared language as a favourable condition for deliberation. Initiatives like the 'EuroPolis' Deliberative Poll ®, bringing together 348 participants from all (then) 27 member states of the European Union, do demonstrate that it is possible to facilitate good deliberation even without a common language (see Fishkin *et al.* 2014). However, such initiatives require intense logistical effort: simultaneous interpretation was provided in 22 different languages.

So, in circumstances in which external deliberation among citizens is deemed unfeasible or undesirable, how could contemporary mini-publics be designed to facilitate a purely internal mode of deliberation instead? Over the last decade, social psychologists have been exploring the potential for imagined contact to replicate the positive effects of physical contact when favourable conditions do not exist to support the latter. In an experimental setting, participants are usually asked to imagine having a positive encounter with a member of the out-group. Compared to a control group, participants who engage in imagined contact with a member of a stigmatised group – including religious groups, sexual minorities, and people with a mental illness – consistently show improvement in explicit and implicit attitudes towards the out-group (Turner *et al.* 2007; Crisp and Turner, 2009; Giacobbe *et al.* 2013).

Garry (2016a) took the principles of the imagined contact hypothesis and applied them to political decision-making. In the deeply divided context of Northern Ireland, he conducted an experiment in which Protestant respondents were asked to imagine having a structured conversation with a member of the Catholic community about the contentious issue of flag display (and vice versa), after receiving relevant background information and perspectives. The main finding was that, with reference to a control condition, imagined dialogue had a positive effect on participants' support for a flag policy based on 'common ground'. While there are significant challenges in designing the structure of an extended imagined dialogue with which mini-public participants can successfully engage, not least in constructing the

'imagined other', Garry demonstrates the basic feasibility of the concept that can be adapted to meet the demands of particular contexts.[96]

6.2.1 Hypotheses

Taking the essential principles of deliberative democracy as the departure point, it should be expected that a citizens' assembly featuring some kind of deliberation – however operationalised – will be perceived as more legitimate than one in which no deliberation takes place. Despite the theoretical and practical potential for internal deliberation to facilitate decision-making in a citizens' assembly, it remains a relatively unconventional approach compared to the well-established practice of mini-public participants engaging in face-to-face discussion. The first hypothesis, therefore, rests on the further expectation that a prototypical mode of mini-public decision-making (based on external deliberation) will ultimately be perceived as more legitimate than one in which decision-making relies on imagined dialogue:

H1: *The occurrence of deliberation increases the perceived legitimacy of citizens' assembly decision-making, particularly when deliberation is external rather than internal.*

This effect is likely to be moderated by the extent to which people value deliberation as a democratic principle. People who see it as an important element of democratic decision-making are expected to be particularly supportive of any form of decision-making that involves deliberation – operationalised either internally or externally –

[96] Although not directly interested in decision-making through internal deliberation, Warner and Villamil (2017) provide compelling experimental evidence that imagined contact helps to improve cross-partisan feelings, reinforcing the potential for imagined contact to be meaningfully applied to political contexts. Online simulations also afford opportunities to operationalise internal deliberation in a consistent, structured manner among participants (see, for example, Kull *et al.* 2012).

compared to people who see it as an unimportant goal. This is not a tautological supposition. Rather, it enables a test of the relationship between two distinct variables: the perceived importance of deliberation and the perceived *legitimacy* of decision-making featuring deliberation across different modes of mini-public design.

H2: *The positive effect of deliberation, external or internal, on the perceived legitimacy of citizens' assembly decision-making is stronger among individuals who value deliberation as a democratic principle.*

Since deliberation involves a willingness among decision-makers to openly consider evidence and arguments, and to weigh up policy options beyond their initial preferences, it is reasonable to expect that the positive effect of deliberation on perceived legitimacy will be moderated by the strength of an individual's ideology; in the context of Northern Ireland, ideology is with respect to the relative strength of underlying ethno-nationalism:

H3: *The positive effect of deliberation, external or internal, on the perceived legitimacy of citizens' assembly decision-making is stronger among individuals with a moderate, rather than a strong, ethno-national ideology.*

Finally, since deliberation involves the equal consideration of different preferences, in a deeply divided place it is likely that individuals from a minority group, who are disadvantaged by purely aggregative decision-making, are likely to be particularly supportive. In contrast, individuals from the majority group, who benefit from decision-making marked by a simple aggregation of individual preferences, may see less need for deliberation. In Northern Ireland, Catholics have been traditionally in

the minority and Protestants in the majority, thus reflecting the final hypothesis on the expected moderating effect of community background:

H4: *The positive effect of deliberation, external or internal, on the perceived legitimacy of citizens' assembly decision-making is stronger among Catholics and weaker among Protestants.*

6.3 Study One

6.3.1 Data & Method

In parallel to recruitment for Study One in Chapter Five, participants were drawn from an online panel hosted by a major UK survey company between late February and early March of 2018.[97] The non-random sample of 265 adults living in Northern Ireland was largely male (71 percent), but contained a greater deal of diversity on community background: 44 percent of respondents were Protestant, 40 percent Catholic, and a further 15 percent of respondents identified their community background with another or no religion. The average age was 47.2 years (*SD* = 13.6 years). Participants completed a 10-minute online questionnaire and received £0.50 in credit to their panel accounts. They were randomly assigned to one of three versions of the survey, each of which presented respondents with a different mode of decision-making via a short vignette. In Group [1], decision-making involved only the presentation of information before members took a decision. In the other two conditions, deliberation was explicitly outlined as a distinct intermediary phase of decision-making: in Group [2] deliberation was external (the prototypical condition); in Group [3] was internal. The experimental conditions are summarised in Table 6.1.

[97] This study also took place alongside recruitment for Study One in Chapter Seven. Participants could only be randomly assigned to a single condition across all three experiments, meaning they could not take part in more than one experiment.

Nature of Decision-Making Process

[1]	[2] PROTOTYPICAL	[3]
Information + decision	Information + external deliberation + decision	Information + internal deliberation + decision

Table 6.1: *Summary of experimental conditions in Study One*

As with the experiments in Chapter Five, respondents were provided with some basic background information to the concept of a citizens' assembly in a text-based vignette. The manipulated text is shown in italics (see *Appendix E* for the three individual vignettes presented in full):

> In Northern Ireland, there are some issues on which elected politicians are divided over the way forward. On these issues, it has been proposed that a citizens' assembly could decide on the way forward instead.
>
> The citizens' assembly would consist of a group of ordinary citizens that is representative of the whole population of Northern Ireland. Members would be randomly chosen, in the same way that legal juries are selected.
>
> The citizens' assembly would consider an issue in [{***two***} {***three***}] **phases**:
>
> **1. Receiving Information**
>
> Participants in the citizens' assembly will be assumed to have no prior knowledge of the issue in question. They will all be provided with background information and presented with arguments from both sides of the issue.
>
> [{ ***2. Group Discussion***
>
> *Participants will then talk about the issue with each other, including with members from a different community. These discussions will take place in small groups of about ten participants, facilitated by a neutral chairperson.*

This will allow participants the opportunity to consider other perspectives as well as their own. They will be asked to try and think about common ground on the issue. }

{ ***2. Imagined Conversation***

Participants will then independently spend time thinking about the issue. They will be asked to imagine that they are having a conversation with a person from another community about the issue. This will allow participants the opportunity to consider other perspectives as well as their own. They will be asked to try and think about common ground on the issue. }]

[{***2.***} {***3.***}] **Taking a Decision**

After learning about the issue, members of the citizens' assembly would then be asked to vote on it. What a majority of these people decided in the vote would be seen as the decision on the issue and would be implemented.

The composition of the citizens' assembly (a representative random sample of citizens) and the nature of the decision (binding;) were held constant across the three conditions. Respondents had to pause for a minimum of 30 seconds on the screen containing the vignette before they could proceed to the survey items. A single manipulation check was embedded in the questionnaire, asking respondents to recall the phases of decision-making mentioned in the vignette.[98]

Immediately after reading the text, respondents were asked to evaluate the decision-making process described. As with the experiments in the previous chapter, the outcome variable of perceived legitimacy was measured using a multi-item

[98] After respondents answered questions measuring to the outcome variable, they were asked, "How would the citizens' assembly consider an issue? Tick the [*two*/*three*] phases that were mentioned." The response options were 'receiving information', 'group discussion', 'imagined conversation' and 'taking a decision'.

scale.[99] The ten items capture relevant aspects of legitimacy: the extent to which the process was *fair*, *trustworthy*, *democratic*, *efficient*, *even-handed*, *acceptable*, *good*, *competent*, *supportable*, and *credible*.[100] The final ten-item scale performed well: factor analysis identified a single dimension, and the combined items have a high degree of internal consistency ($\alpha = .97$).[101]

Later survey items asked respondents to report their ethno-national ideology and community background. The survey also captured support for the principle of deliberation, measured on a five-point unipolar scale on which respondents indicated the extent to which they think it is important "that decisions are made after extensive deliberation (that is, after the careful consideration of evidence and arguments on both sides of an issue)." For this item the content in parentheses was carefully worded to try and convey the underlying essence of the (perhaps unfamiliar) concept without privileging an external or internal version of its application. The full list of questions and response categories can be found in *Appendix E*.

6.3.2 Results

Across the three experimental conditions, there were no significant differences in the mean legitimacy scores of each decision-making process (see Figure 6.1). For Group [2], featuring a prototypical citizens' assembly in which members engage in external

[99] The full wording of the question was: "Imagine the way in which a citizens' assembly would deal with a political issue. As a way of making a decision, to what extent do you think this process would be … fair or unfair; trustworthy or untrustworthy; democratic or undemocratic; efficient or inefficient; even-handed or discriminatory; acceptable or unacceptable; good or bad; competent or incompetent; supportable or unsupportable; credible or not credible?" For each of the ten items there were seven response options on a bipolar scale, for example: 'extremely' (fair), 'mostly' (fair), 'slightly' (fair), 'neither' (fair nor unfair), 'slightly' (unfair), 'mostly' (unfair), and 'extremely' (unfair). See *Appendix E* for the full questionnaire.
[100] See Chapter Five for a discussion on the construction of the multi-item scale, including an explanation of the items included and excluded.
[101] For factor analysis and reliability statistics, refer to *Appendix G*.

deliberation, the mean legitimacy was 3.17 (*SD* = 1.54). This was not higher, let alone significantly higher, than the mean legitimacy of a citizens' assembly without any deliberative phase in decision-making (*M* = 3.19, *SD* = 1.67); similarly, it was not significantly higher than the mean legitimacy of a citizens' assembly in which members engage in internal deliberation (*M* = 3.40, *SD* = 1.48). Overall, there was no direct effect of deliberative mode on the perceived legitimacy of a citizens' assembly ($F(2, 262) = .57$, $p = .57$).

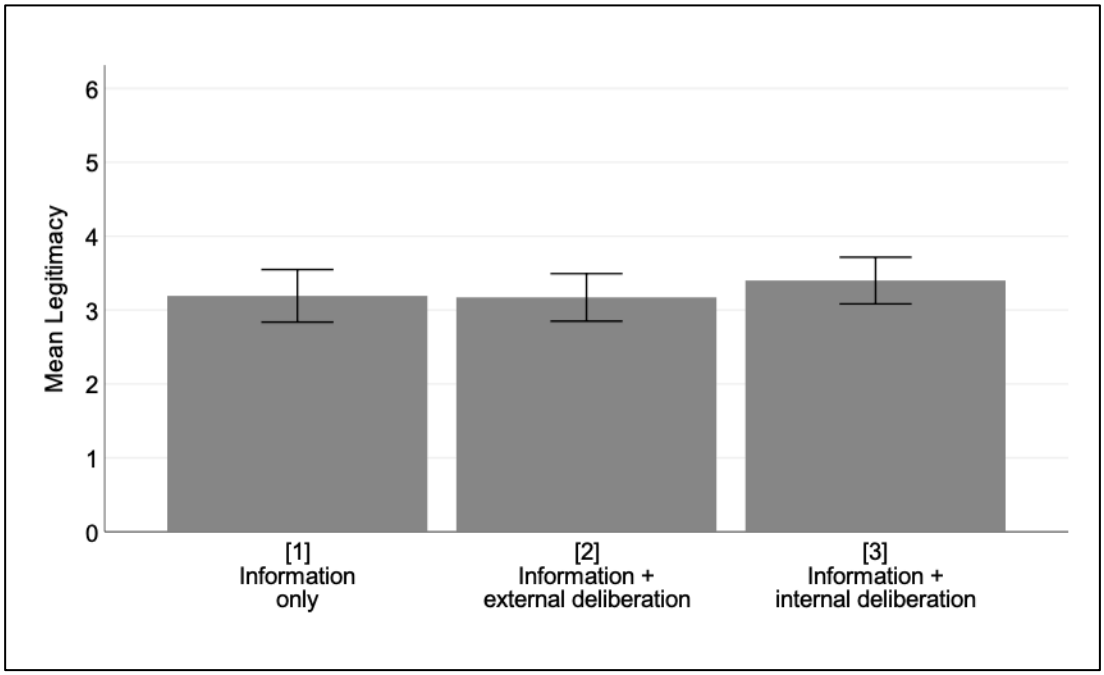


Figure 6.1: *Mean legitimacy scores for each model of citizens' assembly*

	[1] Information only	**[2] Information + ext. deliberation**	**[3] Information + int. deliberation**	**All groups**
Pass	39.1	71.4	26.4	46.0
Fail	60.9	28.6	63.6	54.0
Totals	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 6.2: *Respondents passing or failing manipulation checks in Study One (%)*

However, as with the first experiment presented in Chapter Five, a majority of respondents (54 percent) failed to correctly answer the manipulation check. Pass rates varied significantly across the experimental conditions ($\chi 2$ (2, N = 265) = 38.77, $p < .01$). While most respondents successfully identified the key parts of the manipulation in the second condition, over 60 percent of respondents failed to do so in Groups [1] and [3]. Thus, it is not possible to credibly accept the null hypothesis on the basis of these results.

Two elements of the check were largely unproblematic. Figure 6.2 shows that the vast majority of respondents successfully recognised that 'receiving information' was the first stage of decision-making outlined in each vignette. Similarly, as Figure 6.5 demonstrates, the vast majority of respondents correctly identified 'taking a decision' as the final stage of the process. These features were, of course, constant across the decision-making processes described in each of the three conditions. Confusion appeared to arise over the manipulations themselves: the presence and nature of deliberation. As Figure 6.3 shows, a majority of respondents in Groups [1] and [3] mistakenly identified 'group discussion' as one of the phases of decision-making, perhaps automatically assuming that external deliberation is an inherent feature of a citizens' assembly. The vast majority of respondents recognised that 'imagined conversation' was not part of the decision-making process in Groups [1] and [2], but a significant minority (approximately one-third) in Group [3] failed to identify internal deliberation as a distinct phase described in this condition (see Figure 6.4).

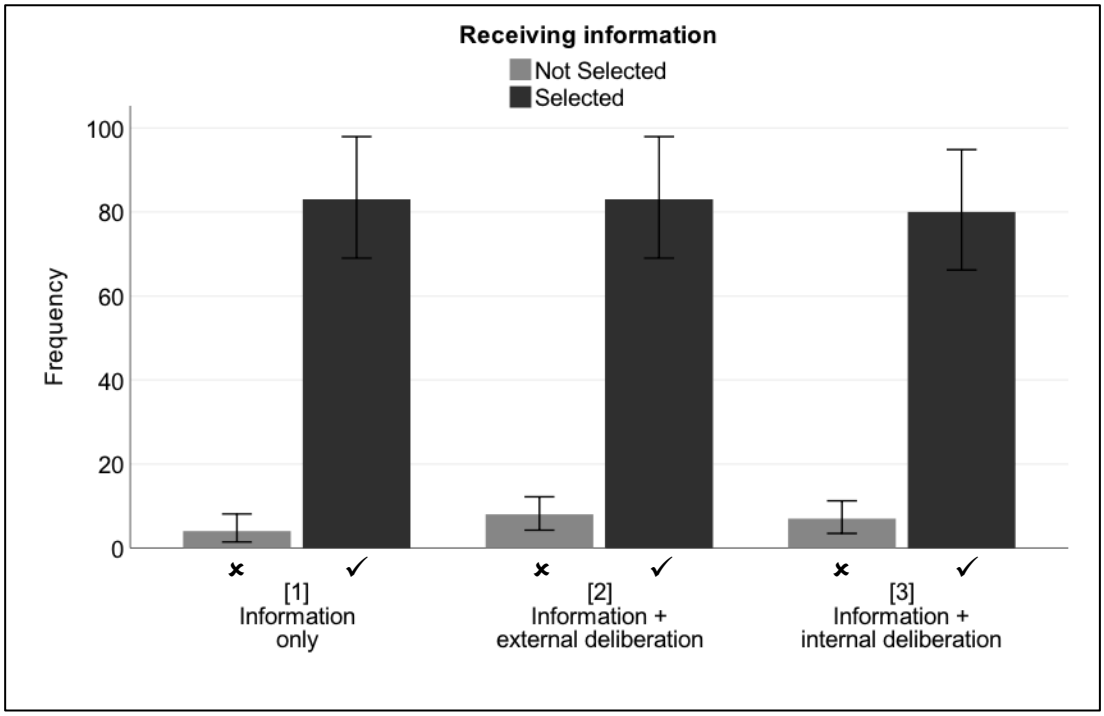


Figure 6.2: *Responses selecting 'receiving information' for the manipulation check: "How would the citizens' assembly consider an issue?"*

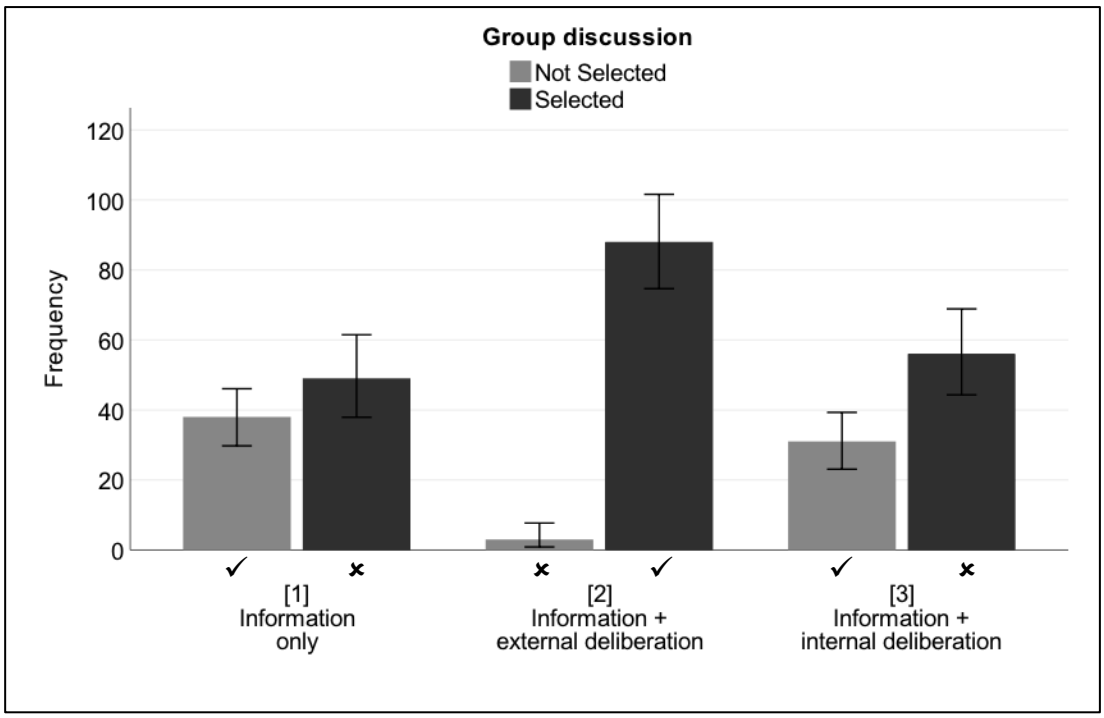


Figure 6.3: *Responses selecting 'group discussion' for the manipulation check: "How would the citizens' assembly consider an issue?"*

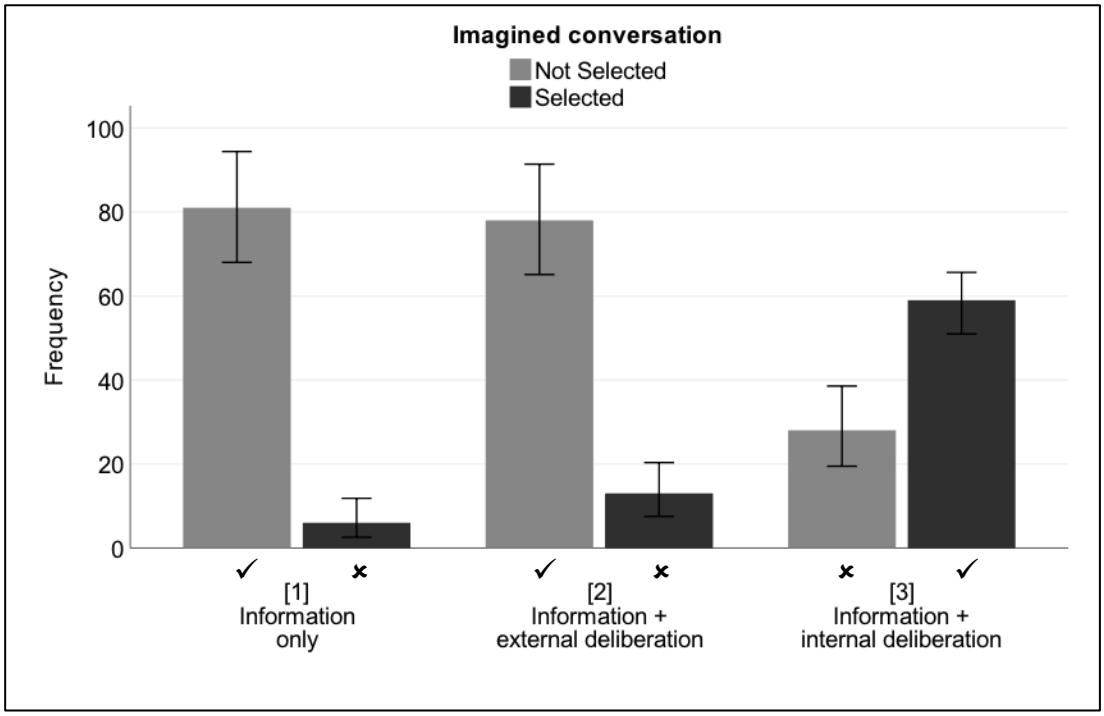


Figure 6.4: *Responses selecting 'imagined conversation' for the manipulation check: "How would the citizens' assembly consider an issue?"*

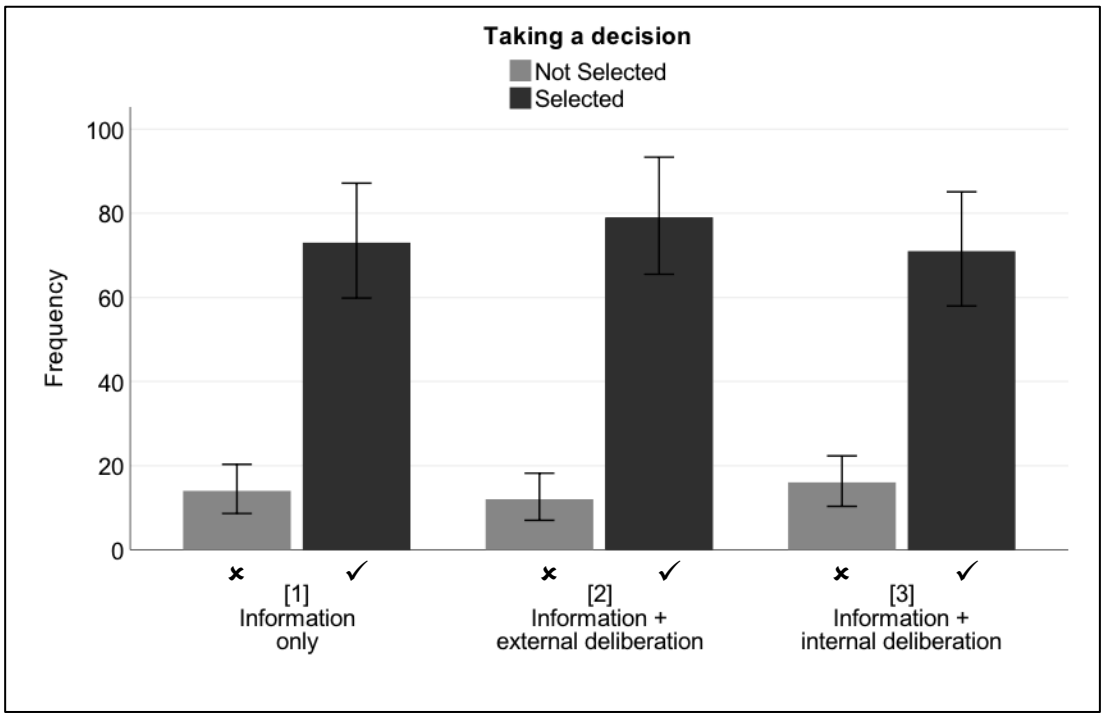


Figure 6.5: *Responses selecting 'taking a decision' for the manipulation check: "How would the citizens' assembly consider an issue?"*

After dropping respondents failing the manipulation check, the substantive conclusion is the same: there are no significant differences in the mean legitimacy score across the three conditions when the analysis is restricted only to the respondents passing the manipulation check.[102] However, accepting the results on this basis would be problematic, given both the high proportion of respondents failing the manipulation check and the uneven distribution of pass rates across the experimental conditions. It is clearly necessary to strengthen the quality of manipulations in order to more convincingly test the effect of deliberation on the perceived legitimacy of citizens' assembly decision-making. Echoing the research process of Chapter Five, the experiment is repeated and refined.

6.4 Study Two

6.4.1 Data & Method

A follow-up study was conducted on a sample of 272 adults living in Northern Ireland, recruited from an online panel of over 10,000 members.[103] They were incentivised to participate by earning reward points that can be redeemed in regular prize draws. The profile of the non-random sample was largely male (80 percent). 44 percent of respondents came from a Protestant community background, 37 percent from a Catholic background, and 18 percent did not identify their community background with either of the two religious groups. Data collection took place from 3-6 June 2018.

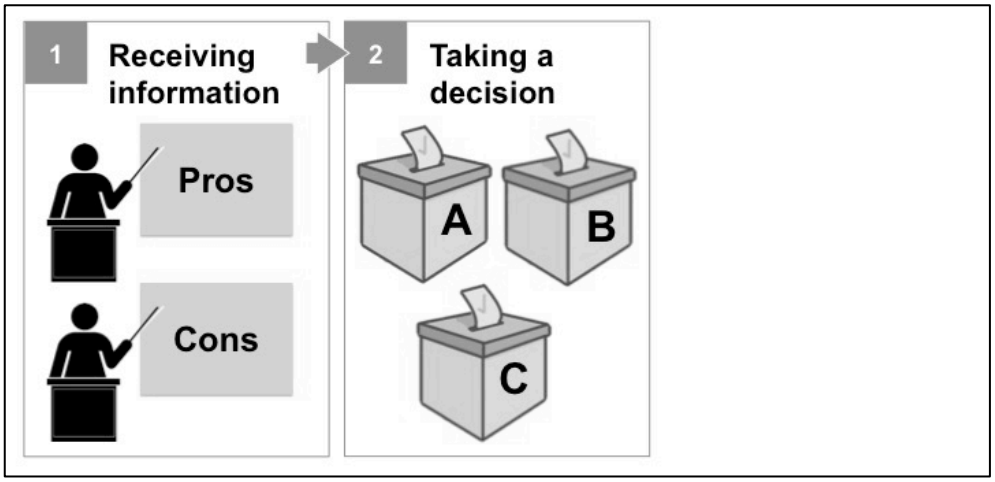
[102] See Tables A15 and A16 in *Appendix G* for alternative analyses.
[103] The panel is hosted by LucidTalk, a survey company based in Northern Ireland. Participants were recruited to this experiment in parallel to Study Two in Chapter Five and Study Two in Chapter Seven. Participants could not participate in more than one of the parallel experiments.

The design of the experiment mirrors that of Study One, apart from three significant amendments. First, respondents were presented with a simple infographic underneath the text-based vignette of each experimental condition. These visual supplements were intended to summarise and reinforce the manipulations as clearly and effectively as possible. As with the structure of the text in each vignette, the three infographics (presented in Figure 6.6) contain consistent representations of the first and last stages of decision-making, with variation in the representation of the intermediate stage (where applicable).

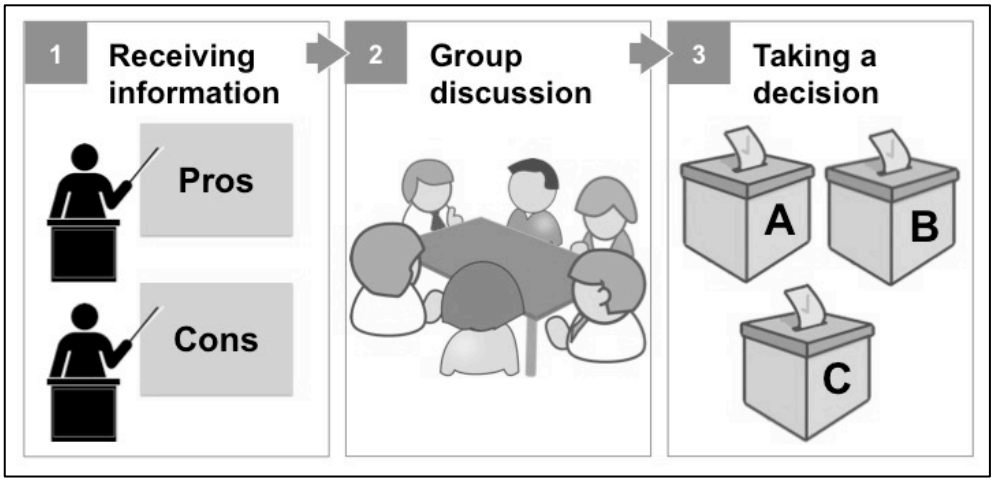
The first phase of receiving information is summarised with the presentation of evidence both for and against a given policy. This emphasises the balanced nature of the information provided to members. The positioning of the presenter behind a lectern is intended to convey the one-way, top-down flow of information, i.e. that members were purely *receiving*, not *discussing*, the information. In contrast, the second infographic emphasises that citizens' assembly members would engage in face-to-face discussion in small groups. While the physical attributes of the citizens were kept deliberately vague, at a minimum the depiction conveys some basic diversity around the table; the members are somehow different from one another.

In the final condition, a combination of hand gestures and thought bubbles around two individuals is used to depict the more abstract concept of internal deliberation via an imagined conversation. This was a more challenging infographic to design, but the thought bubble, together with the hand gestures, are generally understood to represent the internal act of 'thinking'. The depiction of the members facing in opposite directions emphasises their mutual independence, but the fact that there are two is to convey the dialogical aspect of the process. The last stage of each infographic underlines that members will take a collective decision by a formal vote.

[1]



[2]



[3]

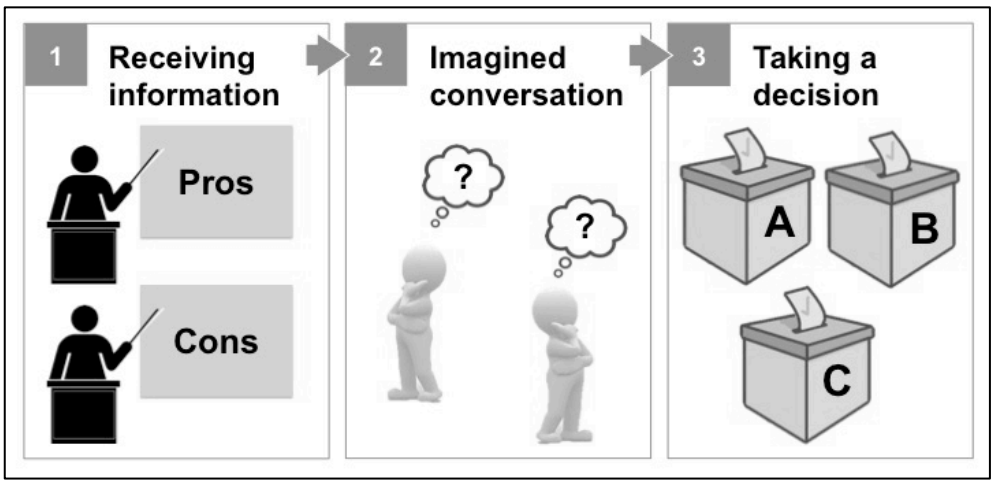


Figure 6.6: *Infographics from the three experimental conditions*

Second, the manipulation check was placed immediately after respondents were presented with the vignette and infographic, and before they completed survey items measuring the outcome variable. The wording of the instrument is the same: "How would the citizens' assembly consider an issue? Tick the [two/three] phases that were mentioned." As in Study One, the response options were simply 'receiving information', 'group discussion', 'imagined conversation', and 'taking a decision'. In the previous version of the experiment, in which respondents completed the manipulation check *after* responding to ten intermediary survey items, it is possible that the clarity of the manipulation faded for a number of respondents during the course of completing the questionnaire. The revised placement minimises this risk and, in turn, reinforces the manipulation itself before respondents evaluate the citizens' assembly described in each condition.

Finally, any respondents initially failing the manipulation check had the opportunity to review his or her original submission. If their selections did not match the correct responses to the manipulation check, they were alerted to the discrepancy, invited to return to the previous page containing the relevant information on citizens' assembly decision-making, and asked to revise their initial selections. Respondents could technically still proceed to the remainder of the questionnaire, but their incorrect responses to the manipulation check would be recorded to facilitate post hoc exclusion. These revisions all reflect the same approach adopted in Chapter Five to overcome high levels of manipulation check failure in the first study.

6.4.2 Results

This time, the vast majority of respondents passed the manipulation check: 94 percent of individuals completing the online survey correctly identified the phases of decision-making mentioned. Almost all respondents recognised that 'receiving information' was an explicit part of the decision-making process in each condition (see Figure 6.7). In Group [2], all respondents correctly identified 'group discussion' as a further stage of decision-making, with a small number of respondents in Groups [1] and [3] incorrectly reporting this to be the case (see Figure 6.8). In marked contrast to Study One, nearly all respondents in Group [3] recognised that 'imagined conversation' was a feature of the citizens' assembly described in their condition (see Figure 6.9). Most respondents correctly selected 'taking a decision' as the final stage of the process described in each condition (see Figure 7.10).

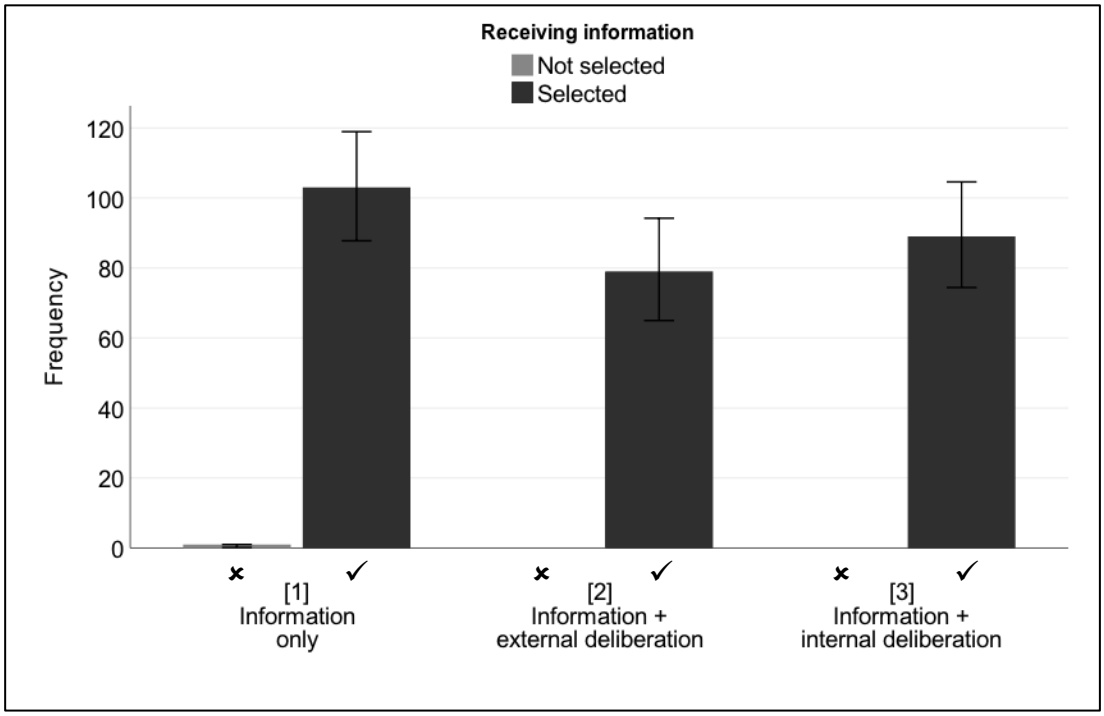


Figure 6.7: *Responses selecting 'receiving information' for the manipulation check: "How would the citizens' assembly consider an issue?"*

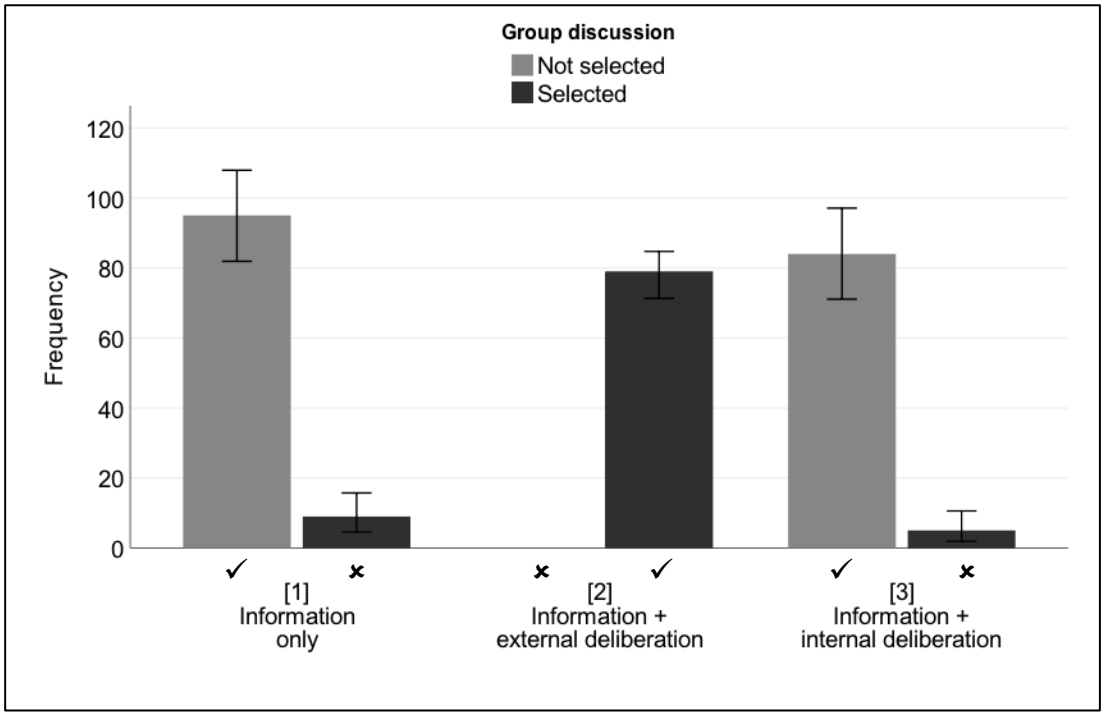


Figure 6.8: *Responses selecting 'group discussion' for the manipulation check: "How would the citizens' assembly consider an issue?"*

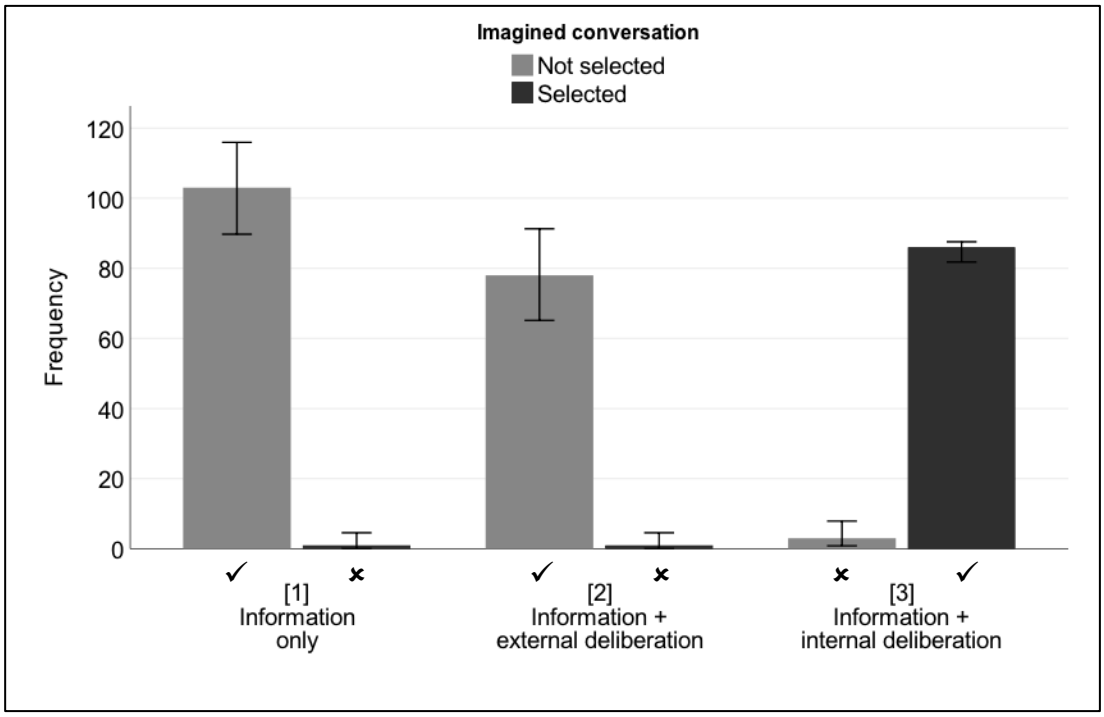


Figure 6.9: *Responses selecting 'imagined conversation' for the manipulation check: "How would the citizens' assembly consider an issue?"*

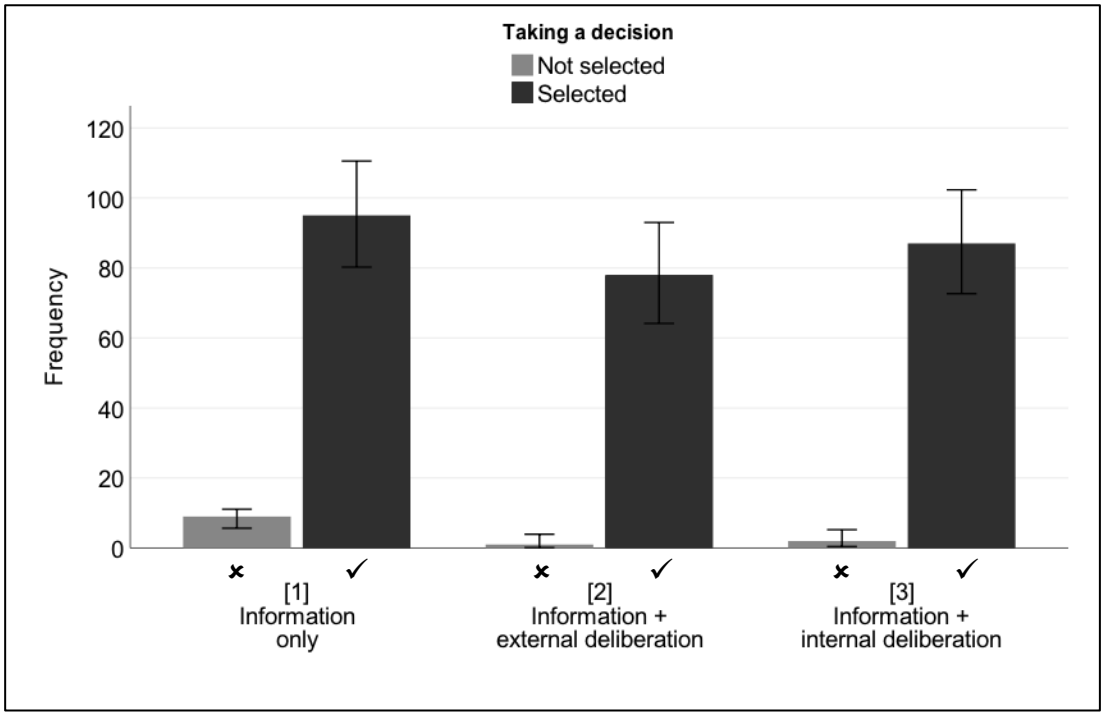


Figure 6.10: *Responses selecting 'taking a decision' for the manipulation check: "How would the citizens' assembly consider an issue?"*

In the analysis that follows, the 16 respondents failing to pass the manipulation check are excluded, leaving 256 valid cases.[104] Consistent with the provisional results of Study One, there was no significant direct effect overall ($F(2, 253) = .59$, $p = .55$). In Group [1], the decision-making process involving simply the presentation of information before taking a decision received a mean legitimacy score of 3.43 ($SD = 1.65$). The presence of external deliberation in Group [2] produced a similar score ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.68$), as did the presence of internal deliberation in Group [3] ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.64$). Therefore, neither the formal addition of deliberation to the decision-making process, nor the distinction between its external and internal forms, had an effect on the perceived legitimacy of citizens' assembly decision-making.

[104] The substantive conclusions emanating from the results are similar when all 272 respondents are included. See Tables A17 and A18 in *Appendix G* for alternative analyses.

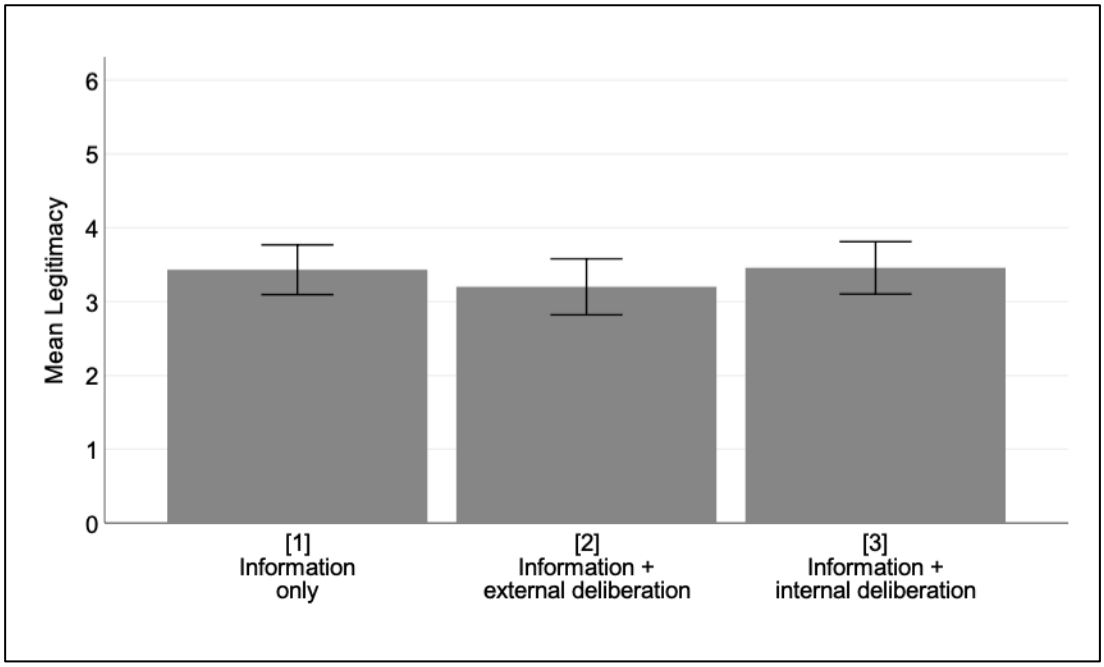


Figure 6.11: *Mean legitimacy scores of each model of citizens' assembly*

However, while there is no direct effect of deliberative mode on the extent to which respondents perceived a citizens' assembly's decision-making process to be legitimate – resulting in the rejection of H1 – there are two significant moderating effects. First, the relationship is moderated by the extent to which respondents value the democratic principle of deliberation itself, providing support for H2.[105] Among the (vast majority of) respondents who considered deliberation to be an important feature of decision-making, the citizens' assembly in each experimental condition was perceived to be equally legitimate.[106] In contrast, as Figure 6.12 illustrates, among those who considered deliberation to be relatively unimportant in decision-making, the addition of a formal deliberation phase – either external or internal – significantly *reduced* the mean legitimacy score by over one unit ($p < .05$). For these

[105] When asked how important it was "that decisions are made after extensive deliberation (that is, after the careful consideration of evidence and arguments on both sides of an issue)," the vast majority of respondents (91.0 percent) said it was 'mostly' or 'very' important. Less than 9 percent of respondents said that it was only 'somewhat', 'not very' or 'not at all' important.
[106] Among those who considered deliberation to important, the mean for Group [1] was 3.43 (*SD* = 1.66), 3.39 for Group [2] (*SD* = 1.66), and 3.55 for Group [3] (*SD* = 1.58).

individuals, the presence of deliberation may have been perceived to come at the expense of other values in decision-making that they generally considered more important, such as expediency, partisanship, or deference to 'common sense'. For the others who *did* value deliberation, the consistency in the mean scores across all three conditions may reflect a belief that the provision of a balanced range of information to decision-makers is sufficient for establishing the basic legitimacy of the process. If deliberation, as narrowly defined in the question, is taken simply to be "careful consideration of evidence and arguments on both sides of an issue," the activities channelled by the experimental conditions – face-to-face discussion and imagined conversations – do not appear strictly necessary for the enhancement of citizens' assembly legitimacy. This finding will be explored further in the discussion section.

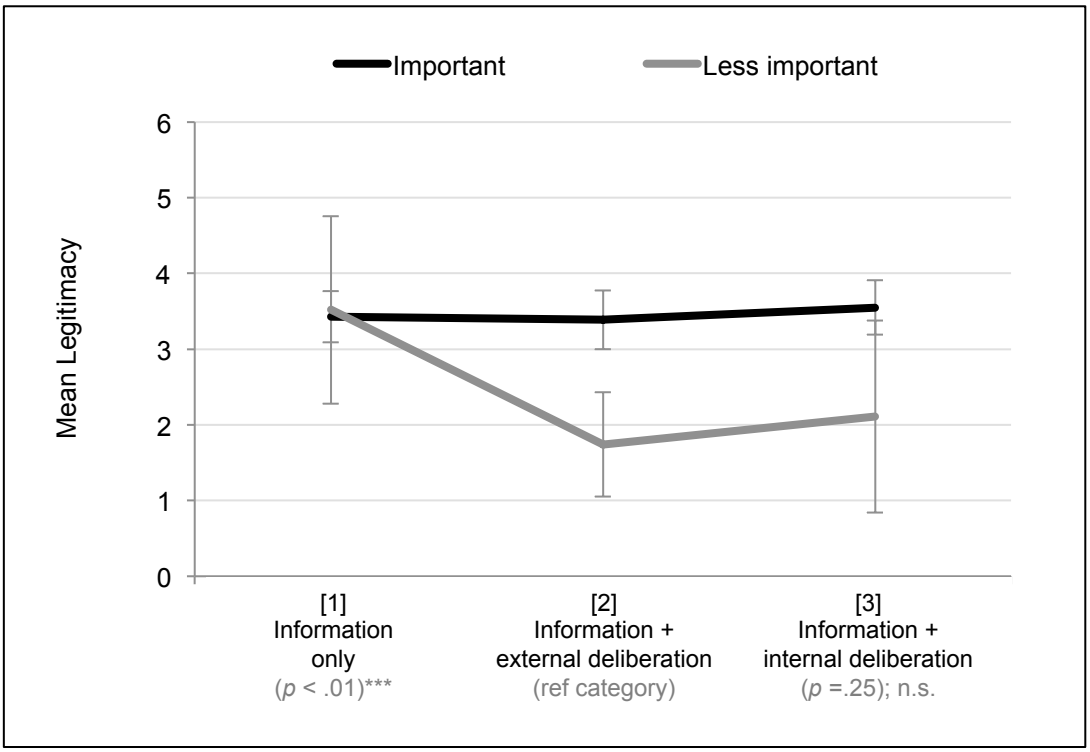


Figure 6.12: *Mean legitimacy scores of each model of citizens' assembly, by perceived importance of deliberation*

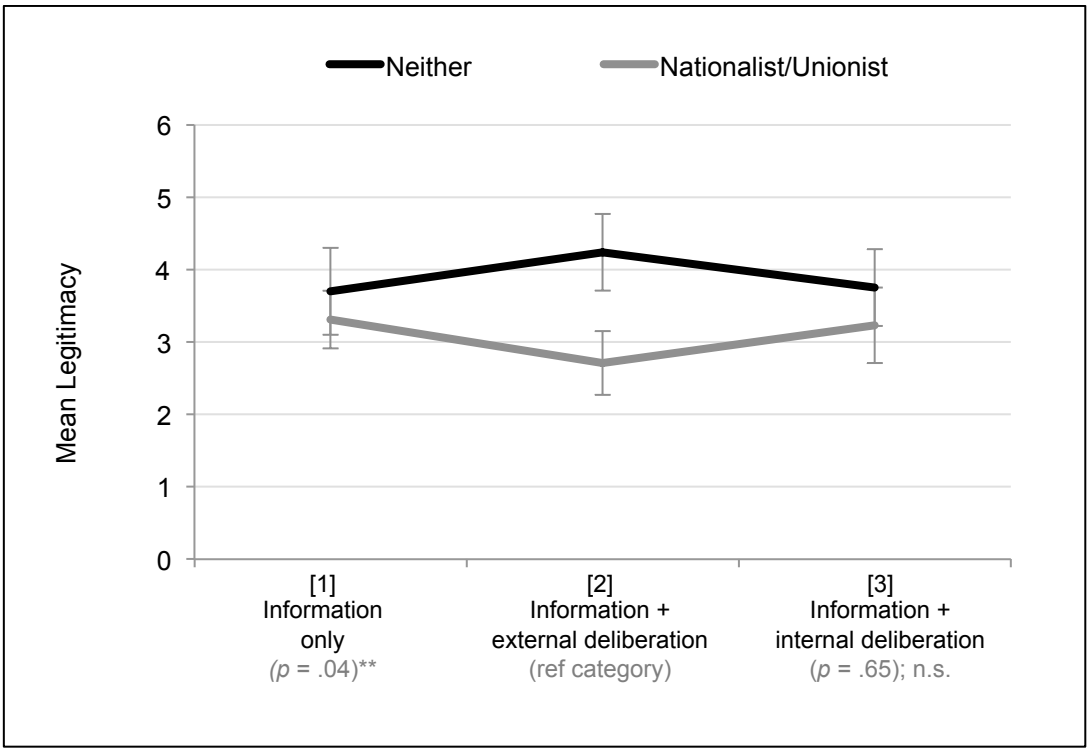


Figure 6.13: *Mean legitimacy scores of each model of citizens' assembly, by ethno-national ideology*

Second, the relationship is moderated by ethno-national ideology. Respondents identifying as neither nationalist nor unionist gave a higher legitimacy score, on average, to each model of citizens' assembly compared to respondents identifying as either nationalist or unionist, as illustrated in Figure 6.13. The magnitude of the differences in effect size was statistically significant between Groups [1] and [2]. A citizens' assembly decision-making process featuring external deliberation had a mean legitimacy score of 4.24 (*SD* = 1.37) among the 'neither' group, compared to 2.71 (*SD* = 1.59) among individuals identifying with one of the two main ethno-national ideologies. The differences were less pronounced in the information only condition. It might be the case that ethno-national moderates associate talk-based deliberation with fair and reasoned dialogue, thus enhancing the legitimacy of decision-making from their perspective, while individuals with stronger ideological

positions might envisage face-to-face discussion descending into an acrimonious dispute among participants, thus weakening the legitimacy of the process. There was some convergence between the two levels of ethno-nationalism on the perceived legitimacy of a citizens' assembly featuring internal deliberation. The differences between the two levels were not significantly different to those observed in either Groups [1] or [2], painting a rather complicated picture in which individuals with different levels of ethno-nationalism do not evaluate a citizens' assembly featuring imagined deliberation in a way that is distinct from the other two conditions. This mode of decision-making might not be so clearly associated with the opportunities that ethno-national moderates associate with face-to-face discussion, compared to the information only condition, but it equally might not be associated with the kind of risks that individuals with a stronger ethno-national position perceive external deliberation to involve. H3 is, therefore, partly confirmed.

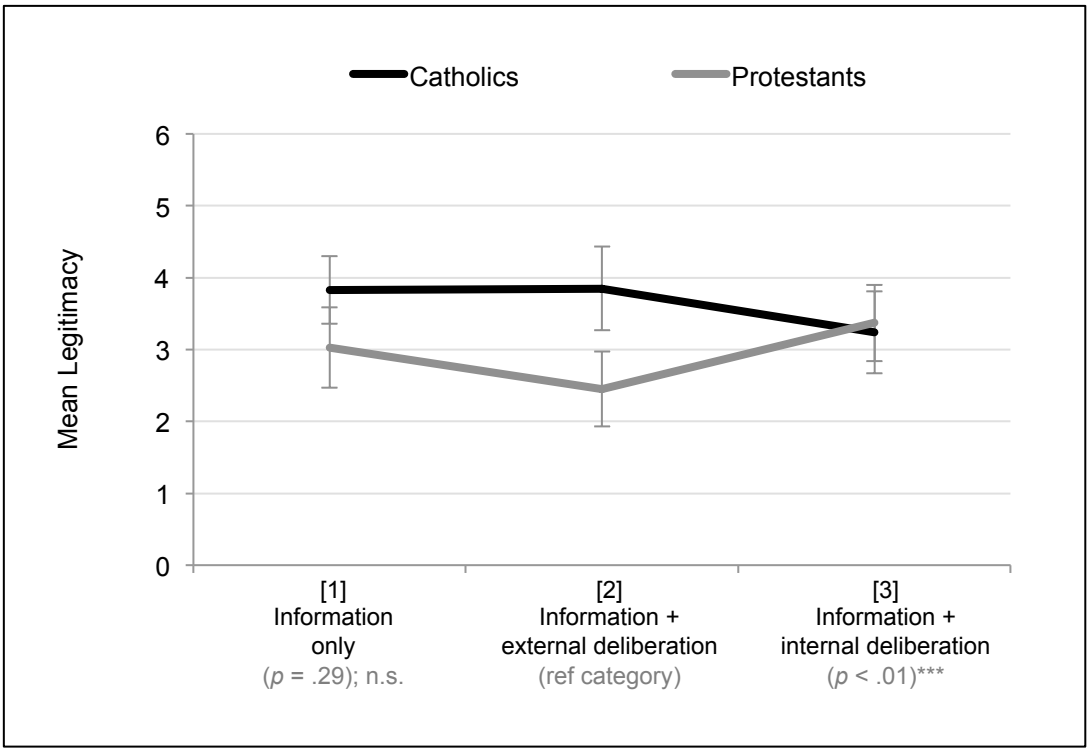


Figure 6.14: *Mean legitimacy scores of each model of citizens' assembly, by community background*

Figure 6.14 indicates that community background also has a moderating effect on the relationship between the mode of decision-making and perceived legitimacy, but not necessarily in the manner expected. Catholic respondents, on average, scored the citizens' assembly featuring imagined deliberation as the least legitimate decision-making model (M = 3.24, SD = 1.71) while Protestant respondents scored it as the most legitimate model (M = 3.37, SD = 1.61). The magnitude of the differences in mean legitimacy is similar across the two groups with respect to the first two modes of decision-making: Catholics consistently evaluated a citizens' assembly featuring information only and external deliberation more positively than Protestants by around one unit or more on the seven-point legitimacy scale. In contrast, H4 predicted that attitudes of Catholics and Protestants would be similar to one another with respect to the citizens' assembly featuring only the presentation of information to members, and that attitudes would diverge in the other two conditions. While it was expected that Protestants would score a citizens' assembly featuring any form of deliberation more negatively than Catholics, we instead see that the two groups converge in their attitudes towards a citizens' assembly featuring internal deliberation. This moderating effect is statistically significant.[107]

As a final stage of the analysis, echoing the approach of the previous chapter, Figure 6.15 presents the mean legitimacy scores for the citizens' assembly described in each of the experimental conditions against the mean scores awarded by respondents to the Northern Ireland Assembly on the same multi-item scale.[108] Overall, decision-making by each hypothetical citizens' assembly received a significantly higher mean legitimacy score compared to decision-making by the

[107] All moderating effects were formally tested with regression analysis, the results of which are reported in *Appendix G*.
[108] Using the same items evaluating citizens' assembly decision-making, respondents were asked to imagine the way in which the Northern Ireland Assembly makes decisions "when it is functioning."

Northern Ireland Assembly.[109] This adds an extra level of robustness to the results of Study Two. The lack of significant variation in the mean legitimacy levels with respect to the Northern Ireland Assembly shows that respondents across the three conditions engaged with the multi-item legitimacy scale in a similar fashion. Furthermore, the differences between the scores for the Northern Ireland Assembly and each model of citizens' assembly show that despite the null effect of the manipulated variable, respondents still demonstrated the capacity to evaluate the legitimacy of different decision-making processes in significantly different ways.

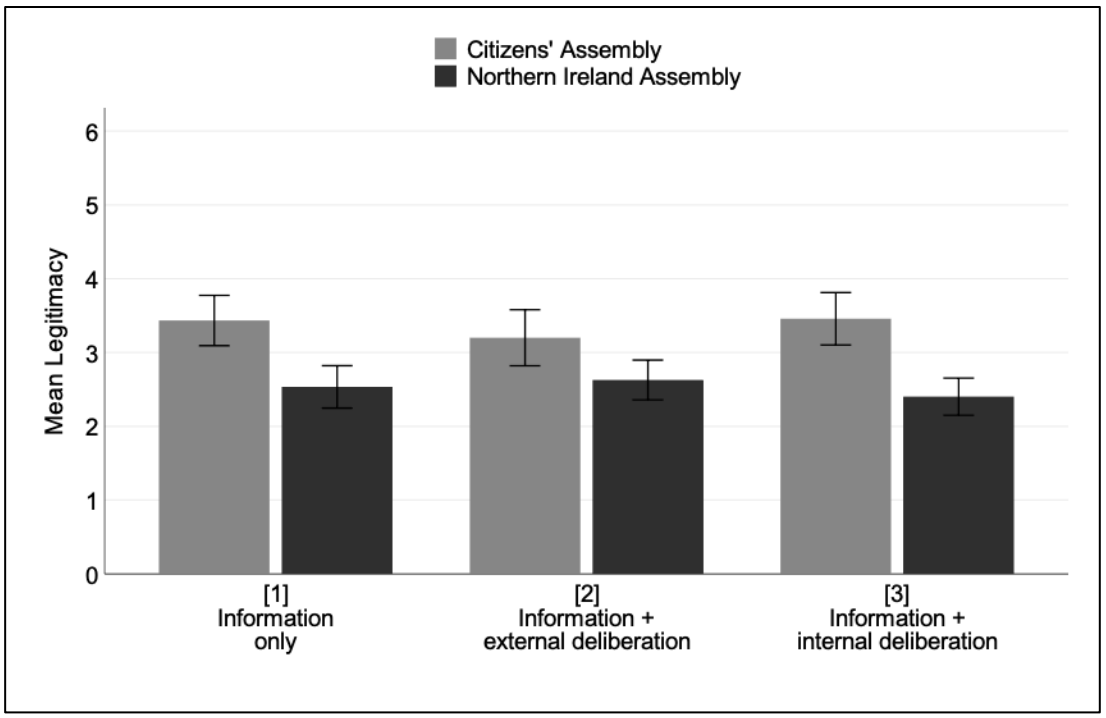


Figure 6.15: *Mean legitimacy scores of each model of citizens' assembly compared to mean legitimacy scores for the Northern Ireland Assembly*

[109] Differences in means were tested using paired samples t-tests (two-tailed), with an alpha level of .05.

6.5 Discussion & Conclusion

According to deliberative theory, the promotion of deliberation in decision-making is crucial for securing the legitimacy of the process and its outcomes. A pollster could find out what a representative sample of the population thinks about a particular issue, off the top of their heads. Meanwhile, a benevolent dictator could make political decisions that people like. In contrast, the purpose of a deliberative mini-public is to find out the *considered* preferences of a microcosm of the population in order to reach decisions that may not necessarily be widely popular, but that can be regarded as legitimate by virtue of the deliberative process through which they have been generated. However, the empirical evidence presented in this chapter seems to suggest that, in general, deliberation does not make any significant difference to the extent to which citizens' assembly decision-making is perceived to be legitimate, irrespective of whether participants engage in a mode of deliberation that is external or internal.

While deliberative democrats may respond to these overall null effects with a mixture of puzzlement and scepticism, it is important that, in true deliberative spirit, they are carefully considered in the round. The most perplexing aspect of the results is that among those who say they value deliberation as an important democratic principle, the addition of deliberation to mini-public decision-making has no positive effect on the extent to which they perceive the process to be legitimate. If deliberation is particularly important to some individuals, how can its presence *not* enhance the perceived legitimacy of a mini-public compared to one in which participants do not formally engage in any active deliberation? The answer likely lies in the design of the experiment itself. Recall that in the first condition, respondents were told that the members of a citizens' assembly would engage in two phases of

decision-making on a particular issue: first, receiving a comprehensive set of information about the issue; and, second, taking a collective decision on the basis of that information. Meanwhile, in the other two conditions, respondents were presented with a different kind of *interactive* decision-making process, with interaction taking place either physically or in an imagined form. Unlike that of the first condition, these two conditions specified a citizens' assembly in which members would engage in a distinct deliberation phase of interactive decision-making, in between learning about the issue and taking a collective decision. While these manipulations were intended to capture the effects of decision-making featuring information *plus* interactive deliberation, relative to decision-making featuring *only* the provision of information to mini-public members (without any form of interaction), the effectiveness of the manipulation may have varied across different respondents. This is not simply to say that the manipulations had different effects on different individuals, which any experiment seeks to establish, but that different individuals may have interpreted the manipulations in divergent ways.

At the heart of this concern is the extent to which respondents perceived interactive deliberation to be entirely absent from the 'information only' citizens' assembly described in the first condition. While it made no explicit reference to a distinct deliberation phase featuring a form of interaction, it is possible that some respondents still imagined that the activity of a citizens' assembly necessarily involves face-to-face group discussion among participants in either the learning or decision-taking phases. Given the relative novelty of the concept of a citizens' assembly, this explanation may only be true for a small number of cases. Much more likely is the possibility that many respondents took *internal* deliberation to be an inevitable feature of any of the mini-public decision-making processes described,

even when the process is reduced to participants simply receiving information and subsequently using it to take a decision, without any form of interaction, face-to-face or imagined. In other words, it could be hard to imagine that in between receiving a comprehensive set of information and taking a decision, decision-makers would not be independently weighing up the evidence in their own minds before choosing their preferred policy outcome.

This interpretation does not appear to have been universal, as demonstrated by the significant moderating effect of the perceived importance of deliberation on the perceived legitimacy of mini-public decision-making. Individuals for whom deliberation is *not* an important democratic principle were significantly less likely to perceive citizens' assemblies to be legitimate when decision-making included a distinct interactive deliberation phase, operationalised through either external or internal modes. If these individuals do not care very much about deliberation, presumably it would have been easier for these individuals to imagine its relative absence from the 'information only' condition of the experiment. In contrast, the explicit framing of interactive deliberation in the remaining two conditions causes these individuals to perceive the deliberative citizens' assemblies to be significantly less legitimate compared to individuals for whom deliberation is an important democratic value.

Further research is, therefore, needed to clarify the overall effect of *interactive* deliberation on the perceived legitimacy of a mini-public decision-making process. At a minimum, a revised version of the experiments presented in this chapter could include a much stricter control condition in which the members of a citizens' assembly do not receive any information before taking a collective decision. An 'information only' condition could then be understood to facilitate

internal deliberation among individual participants, without any interactive element, and compared directly against a stripped-back condition in which members do not have the opportunity to meaningfully engage in any kind of internal deliberation. A different approach could involve the construction of mini-public conditions in which key deliberative principles are both promoted and violated. For example, by explicitly injecting partisanship, bargaining, or biased information provision, into mini-public decision-making, we may obtain a clearer understanding of the extent to which high quality deliberation, interactive or otherwise, adds real value to the perceived legitimacy of the process.

Still, despite the potential inseparability of internal deliberation from information provision in an experimental treatment, it is important to recall that the former was operationalised in its own right in a rather unconventional fashion: as imagined dialogue. Respondents were told that citizens' assembly members would be instructed to "imagine that they are having a conversation with a person from another community," and to use this structured mental simulation to help them each reach a decision on the issue in question. The very fact that this process is evaluated so similarly to the other conditions is a noteworthy finding. Reflecting solely on its effect on legitimacy, it shows that the concept of imagined contact in political decision-making is taken seriously by citizens – at least as seriously as decision-making featuring face-to-face interaction or the mere provision of a balanced range of information.

Beyond academic experiments in social psychology and, more recently, in political science, imagined interaction has had limited formal application. And yet, in the context of intense political disagreement, previous studies have shown the potential for imagined contact to induce opinion shift in the direction of a common

ground position, as well as to reduce the attribution of malevolent intentions to political opponents (Garry 2016a; Warner and Villamil, 2017). The findings of this chapter suggest that if this mode of deliberation were to be formally adopted in mini-public decision-making, members of the broader public are willing to give it a chance. Such flexibility in procedural design may be of great value in contexts where direct contact is impractical and/or potentially counter-productive.

Indeed, in the deeply divided context of Northern Ireland, we do see a significant difference in the way people respond to external versus internal deliberation across different levels of ethno-national ideological intensity and different community backgrounds. Individuals who are neither unionist nor nationalist perceived talk-based discussion to significantly enhance the legitimacy of mini-public decision-making, compared to the other modes of decision-making and, indeed, compared to respondents who are unionist or nationalist. Among the latter, however, talk-based deliberation reduced the extent to which they perceived the process to be legitimate. This moderating effect is unsurprising. People with stronger ideological views, especially on ethno-nationalism, might imagine that participants in a deliberative setting will share similarly strong ideological views. Such a gathering, they might envisage, could easily descend into a shouting match, with *destructive* consequences for collective decision-making. On the other hand, if people with more moderate ideological views project themselves into such an environment, they may envisage participants being open to reason and persuasion, fulfilling the underlying goals of deliberative democracy, with *constructive* consequences for collective decision-making.

Additional research is needed to confirm whether or not this is indeed the mechanism explaining the moderating effect of ethno-nationalism on the perceived

legitimacy of decision-making featuring external rather than internal deliberation. If it is, it is possible that concerns over face-to-face discussion among individuals with stronger ideological preferences may be assuaged by practical demonstrations that, under carefully designed conditions, deliberation can indeed yield constructive and respectful interactions, even when the assembled participants share a diverse range of strongly-held views (see Steiner, 2012; Luskin *et al.* 2014). In the meantime, the roughly even level of cross-community support for a citizens' assembly featuring imagined dialogue suggests that such an approach could play a helpful role as a rehearsal, in advance of deliberation featuring physical interaction.

In sum, this chapter has attempted to answer two questions, both with implications for the design of citizens' assemblies and other forms of deliberative mini-public. First, does the presence of deliberation in a mini-public increase the perceived legitimacy of decision-making from the maxi-public? The empirical evidence suggests that as long as the mini-public members are provided with comprehensive and balanced information, a formal, interactive deliberation phase makes no significant difference to the perceived legitimacy of decision-making. However, the effect of information provision and deliberation requires deeper investigation. Second, does the *mode* of interactive deliberation affect perceived legitimacy? Overall, the answer appears to be 'no': mini-publics featuring deliberation operationalised either externally or internally are perceived as equally legitimate at the aggregate level. While this offers considerable flexibility and creativity around citizens' assembly design, variation in attitudes at the individual-level emphasises the need for a deliberative decision-making process to carefully reflect the context and purpose of the mini-public.

Chapter Seven

THE PROCESS OF TAKING DECISIONS

LEGITIMACY AT THE OUTPUT STAGE OF MINI-PUBLIC DECISION-MAKING

> *Mission Control*: I presume that you're doing this with the full permission and – of the commander.
>
> *Apollo 13*: And this – at this moment, who do you think is the commander?
>
> Radio communication between Mission Control and Apollo 13 Lunar Module Pilot Fred Haise, 14 April 1970 (NASA, 1970: 381)

Once a mini-public produces an output, a decision, where does it go? Should statutory authorities declare prior to the taking of the decision that they will be bound by it? Or should a mini-public be restricted to producing a *recommendation*, directed elsewhere for a final decision? And, if so, who should take the final decision: politicians in a legislature, or voters in a referendum? These are some of the most consequential – and sensitive – questions around the design of citizens' assemblies. They address the nature of such a body's relationship with the broader political system: whether it serves to advise other bodies, or whether it has the power in its own right to take a policy decision that will be implemented.

Almost exclusively, citizens' assemblies are designed to be consultative bodies, but is this prototypical practice rooted in public preferences, or is it simply a

convention rooted in undue caution? This chapter investigates the degree to which the perceived legitimacy of a citizens' assembly is conditional on its level of power. Do citizens themselves see mini-publics as more legitimate when they are constrained to make recommendations, rather than binding decisions? If so, why is this the case? The chapter begins by setting out the theoretical justification for limiting the power of mini-publics to take decisions in their own right. Drawing on Fishkin's principle of non-tyranny, it considers the risk that citizens' assemblies could take 'bad' decisions, requiring politicians or the wider electorate to be able to step in and help prevent tyrannical outcomes. However, despite the fact that mini-publics rarely have the power to take binding decisions in practice, the results of an experiment presented in this chapter demonstrate that on a salient ethno-national issue, overall, a citizens' assembly with such power is perceived to be just as legitimate as one that is limited to making recommendations. Crucially, the perceived legitimacy of such an arrangement is particularly high among individuals who value the promotion of non-tyranny in democratic decision-making. The chapter concludes by considering the implications of these findings for the design of mini-publics, particularly those in deeply divided settings.

7.1 Promoting Non-Tyranny

In addition to the promotion of political equality and deliberation in decision-making, Fishkin insists that the decisions resulting from a democratic process must be non-tyrannical. Here, a tyrannical outcome is understood as "the choice of policy that imposes severe deprivations when an alternative policy could have been chosen that would have imposed no severe deprivations on anyone" (Fishkin, 1991: 34). The

basic concern is straightforward: even if decision-makers generate policies in a democratic fashion, they are still capable of, as Fishkin (2009: 60) bluntly puts it, doing "bad things." Tyrannical decisions are not simply those that could be regarded as unacceptable or undesirable by certain individuals, but ones that violate their essential interests, such as their human rights, when an alternative outcome was possible. They can arguably be best understood with reference to societal groups, possessing either majority or minority status. Majority tyranny occurs when one group is able to take decisions that systematically discriminate against the basic interests of a minority community, in favour of furthering the interests of the majority group. Under the old unionist regime in Northern Ireland, for example, one party was able to exercise power for almost half a century. With a perpetual majority of votes and legislative seats, historical evidence shows that the Ulster Unionist Party government enabled decision-making to benefit the majority Protestant community and, over time, neglected basic interests of the minority Catholic community (see Whyte, 1983).[110]

Counter-intuitively, Fishkin argues that tyrannical outcomes can also arise from the choices of a minority. If a minority group were able to veto a course of action favoured by a majority of citizens, and if this non-decision violated people's basic interests when such harm could have been avoided, Fishkin (2009: 62) holds that "policy *omission* as well as commission" (original emphasis) can produce tyrannical consequences. For example, under Northern Ireland's contemporary consociational model of government, critics have suggested that low veto thresholds allow a minority group to block reasonable policies that have no discriminatory effect on the rival group's interests. When the exercise of such vetoes results in

[110] Examples of discrimination included the gerrymandering of electoral districts (mainly at the local government level), and systematic inequalities in public employment, policing, housing allocation, and regional development policies (Whyte, 1983).

gridlock, and even the collapse of devolved government, it could be argued that the basic interests of all citizens are jeopardised, irrespective of group identity.[111]

Whereas political equality and deliberation are democratic values that can be promoted within the procedural design of a decision-making *process*, the principle of non-tyranny differs in that it concerns the substantive *outcome(s)* of a process. For Fishkin, deliberative democracy makes an explicit commitment to political equality and deliberation, but is essentially agnostic when it comes to the avoidance of tyranny. Leaving open the definition of the severe deprivations that are consequent to tyrannical decisions, the challenge for democratic institutional design is to minimise the likelihood of such decisions, to the extent that they are *perceived* as fundamentally unjust, from arising in the first place.[112] Notably, as expressed by Hamilton in the *Federalist* No. 78, the framers of the US Constitution intended for a strong, independent judicial system to guard against "serious oppressions" of individuals, particularly those from a minority group (Hamilton, 1788). They also intended for multiple institutions to hold each other to account, constituting a process of checks and balances seminally articulated by Madison in the *Federalist* No. 63. In the event that the House of Representatives reached a discriminatory decision based on the numerical strength of a majority faction, the Senate, designed to be a more deliberative body and less prone to factional influence, was to serve as a "defence to the people against their own temporary errors and delusions" (Madison, 1788).

[111] For example, a report produced by Deloitte highlights "huge challenges" across the public sector in Northern Ireland, with political and economic difficulties "exacerbated by the absence of (government) Ministers" (Deloitte, 2018: 3). The lack of strategic decision-making is argued to have an adverse effect on health, education, justice and housing, as well as the broader economy.

[112] Fishkin generally avoids an attempt to define the severe deprivations that constitute tyranny: "We can leave open the exact definition of severe deprivations but specify that the more severe they are, and the more clearly avoidable they are, the more compelling is the case of majority (or minority) tyranny" (Fishkin, 2009: 64).

When considering the potential role of mini-publics in a political system, and the nature of their decisions, a strong argument for them to be given a prominent role is precisely that their decisions are the product of *deliberation* among a representative group of the population.[113] In this sense, the very process of deliberation may help to reduce the likelihood that the considered judgements of a mini-public will impose severe deprivations on any particular group – similar to the rationale for the Senate. Significantly, however, when it comes to matters of ordinary legislation, the deliberative decisions of the US Senate are not unilateral. Just as its decisions feed into a system of checks and balances, the appropriate status of mini-public decisions must be considered against the requirements and logic of the broader system in which they sit.

7.2 Mini-Public Decisions

In almost all circumstances, deliberative mini-publics are understood to be consultative bodies, even when they are explicitly coupled to the state.[114] That is, when a statutory body commissions a mini-public in which citizens learn about a specified issue, the members engage with the relevant evidence and arguments, they weigh up the possible options according to a pre-defined remit, and they produce a recommendation or set of recommendations for the commissioning body to consider. The output of the mini-public, thus, carries an advisory status: it can either be accepted or rejected, and so there is no guarantee that (a) mini-public decision(s) will ultimately be implemented. The authority to take a legally binding decision lies

[113] For a dissenting normative argument, see Lafont (2015).
[114] For the purposes of this research, our attention will focus on mini-publics that are commissioned by the state. Sometimes it is desirable for mini-publics to be sponsored by (a) civil society organisation(s), rather than by the state. See Kuyper and Wolkenstein (2018) for a useful typology.

elsewhere in the political system through established procedures. Such an arrangement may minimise the risk of tyrannical outcomes, but it may also give political elites the opportunity to override any decisions with which they disagree.

If a prototypical decision-taking process exists for citizens' assembly recommendations, the modal global experience has been for their advisory decisions to be put to a referendum. This way, all voters in the given jurisdiction have the opportunity to endorse or reject the considered decision recommended by their fellow citizens in a mini-public. When British Columbia's provincial government proposed a citizens' assembly on electoral reform in 2003 (the BCCA), its terms of reference were unanimously passed by the provincial legislature. Under this clear mandate, it was agreed that any decision taken by the BCCA "must be made by a vote of the majority" of its members, and that its final report should be presented to the province's Attorney General "for tabling in the Legislative Assembly" (Government of British Columbia, 2003: 1). On top of its terms of reference, the legislation underpinning the BCCA specified that, unless the body decided to maintain the status quo, any recommended change to the electoral system must be put to all eligible voters in a province-wide referendum. The government would be legally bound to introduce legislation giving effect to an affirmative referendum result – provided at least 60 percent of voters endorsed the citizens' assembly recommendation, and that it was supported by a majority of voters in at least 60 percent of the province's electoral districts.

In the end, the final report of the BCCA in 2004 *did* recommend changing British Columbia's electoral system, from a Single Member Plurality System to the Single Transferable Vote (Warren and Pearse, 2008). In line with the commissioning

legislation, a referendum was held six months later.[115] While 58 percent of voters endorsed the BCCA recommendation, on a respectable turnout of 62 percent, the level of support fell short of the super-majority threshold that had been set under the original legislation.[116] Before and after the referendum, there were plenty of criticisms of this super-majority threshold (Ruff, 2004; Pilon, 2010). However, the fundamental point remains: had the referendum passed, under the pre-defined criteria, the government was legally bound to introduce legislation giving effect to the citizens' assembly recommendation. This leads Warren (2008: 69) to classify the BCCA as a formally "empowered" decision-making venue, distinct from a purely advisory forum.

In the Republic of Ireland, we observe a slightly different process. While the government was not legally bound in advance to put mini-public decisions to a national referendum, of the recommendations that it chose to put to a popular vote, most were endorsed and subsequently implemented. In 2012, the Irish government established a Constitutional Convention to consider eight selected issues.[117] Three of the Convention's final proposals were put to a national referendum: the legalisation of same-sex marriage, the removal of the ban on blasphemy from the Irish Constitution, and a reduction in the minimum age for candidacy in presidential elections. Two of the proposals were decisively endorsed: 62 percent of voters agreed with the Convention's recommendation to legalise same-sex marriage, while

[115] After the BCCA presented its report to the Attorney General in December 2004, "Should British Columbia change to the BC-STV electoral system as recommended by the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform? [Yes/No]."

[116] British Columbia's Electoral Reform Referendum Act (2004) also required that, in order for the result to be binding on the provincial government, the proposal must be supported by a majority of voters in at least 60 percent (or 48) of the province's 79 electoral districts. This threshold was met in the referendum itself: a majority of valid votes supported the citizens' assembly's proposed reform in 77 out of 79 districts.

[117] The agenda of the Convention also included: reducing the voting age to 17, reviewing the electoral system, extending the franchise in presidential elections to Irish citizens living abroad, amending the Irish Constitution's clause on the role of women, and increasing women's participation in politics.

65 percent supported removing the constitutional ban on blasphemy.[118] The Convention's recommendation to reduce the minimum age for 35 to 21 for candidates standing for Irish presidency was rejected by 75 percent of the electorate.[119] In 2016, the Irish government commissioned a second deliberative mini-public, the Irish Citizens' Assembly, to consider a further set of five specified issues. It subsequently put one of its recommendations – to repeal and replace a constitutional ban on abortion – to a national referendum, in which the proposition was endorsed by 65 percent of voters.[120] Recommendations on the other four topics considered by the Citizens' Assembly were submitted in reports to the Irish Parliament, as per the terms under which the body was established, but to date these have not been put to a national referendum.

The Irish case, therefore, highlights the authority of the commissioning body, the government, in setting the agenda and ultimately controlling the status of any of its outcomes. However, it also highlights the potentially powerful legitimating effect of popular referendums. None of the Irish mini-public recommendations have been approved without the endorsement of a majority of voters, and the decision of each referendum held on a mini-public recommendation has been, or is in the process of being, implemented by the Irish government. At the very least, in this sense, mini-publics have played a consequential co-decision-making role in Ireland, alongside politicians and voters.

Another model of mini-public design limits participation in the subsequent taking of decisions to political elites, without any formal consultation of the wider electorate in a referendum. In 2018, two parliamentary committees of the British

[118] These referendums were held on two separate dates: the former took place on 22 May 2015 (the year after the work of the Convention ended); the latter occurred three years later, on 26 October 2018.
[119] This vote was held concurrently with the referendum on the legalisation of same-sex marriage.
[120] See Field (2018) for an overview of the referendum.

House of Commons co-commissioned a citizens' assembly to consider the politically sensitive topic of social care.[121] The chairpersons of the committees, Dr Sarah Wollaston MP and Clive Betts MP, jointly explained their decision to initiate a mini-public of this kind: "We strongly believe that the public needs to be involved in answering these questions and decisions about a sustainable way of funding social care" (Involve, 2018a: 4). It was the first time in the UK that a citizens' assembly had been formally established by Parliament, and MPs seemed impressed with both the process and its outcomes: the committees' joint 80-page report on the future of social care funding made 48 references to the mini-public's recommendations (House of Commons, 2018a).[122] Under British parliamentary procedure, the government normally issues a formal response to a committee report. In this instance, a formal response has not yet been released. While the government is under no statutory obligation to endorse the recommendations of parliamentary committees, recent systematic analysis has found that approximately half go on to be implemented (Benton and Russell, 2013). Under this model, it is therefore unclear as to whether or not citizens' assembly decisions are ultimately adopted; it *is* clear that, no matter how compelling they may be in their own right, their outputs are purely advisory.

In contrast, certain decisions of a mini-public in Gdańsk have been binding on the municipal government. After severe flooding repeatedly caused damage to the city, a citizens' assembly was established to consider potential changes to local planning policies that could help prevent any recurrence of the problem. The Mayor

[121] The Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee and the Health and Social Care Committee jointly commissioned the mini-public.

[122] A number of academic-led initiatives have been held previously in the UK. Citizens' assemblies were held in the North and South of England respectively on democratic reform in 2015, organised by a team of researchers and civil society organisations (see Flinders *et al.* 2016). A further citizens' assembly was held in 2017 to consider the issues arising from the UK's planned departure from the European Union (see Renwick *et al.* 2018).

of Gdańsk agreed in advance of the establishment of the citizens' assembly that its decisions would be implemented, provided they received the support of at least 80 percent of members (Gerwin, 2018). Any decisions that received support below this super-majority threshold were treated as suggestions for consideration, but with no prior commitment from the municipal government that they would be adopted. However, even when the 80 percent threshold was met, there was no *legal* basis compelling the municipal government to adopt the proposals. Implementation relied on a *political* commitment from a sympathetic mayor and his personal endorsement of the process. He retained the authority to ignore the body's decisions, even those commanding an 80 percent super-majority, if he was in strong enough disagreement with any of its substantive outcomes. Still, even without *de jure* authority, the Gdańsk case illustrates the potential for citizens' assemblies to take decisions that are *de facto* binding.

7.2.1 Hypotheses

Consistent with the studies in Chapters Five and Six, we take as our departure point the expectation that a prototypical model of citizens' assembly decision-making will be regarded as more legitimate than models that deviate from established processes. Accordingly, a citizens' assembly with the power to make a recommendation should be seen as more legitimate than one possessing the power to take a binding decision in its own right. More specifically, a process in which the recommendation is put to all voters in a referendum – the most common arrangement – is likely to be seen as more legitimate than one in which politicians accept or reject the recommendation. The first hypothesis, therefore, has two related elements:

H1a: *The perceived legitimacy of citizens' assembly decision-making is highest when it has the power to make a recommendation, rather than to take a binding decision.*

H1b: *Perceived legitimacy will be higher when the recommendation is put to a referendum, rather than to political representatives.*

To move beyond conventional practice and deeper into democratic theory, we must consider the normative justification for a co-decision-making process, at least according to Fishkin's logic: to help avoid tyrannical outcomes. If a mini-public were established with the authority to take binding decisions of its own, there would be no other body to serve as a check on its decisions. Among those who think it is particularly important that democratic decisions that do not unfairly discriminate against certain groups, it is reasonable to expect that they would prefer an additional level of decision-making to help minimise the risk of that a simple majority of citizens' assembly members would take a decision with tyrannical consequences for a minority. Moreover, given the majoritarian nature of referendums, it is likely that these individuals would prefer this sanctioning role to be performed by professional politicians, operating within institutional constraints, rather than the mass public:

H2a: *Among individuals who value non-tyranny as a democratic principle, the perceived legitimacy of citizens' assembly decision-making will be particularly low when it has the power to take a binding decision.*

H2b: *For these individuals, perceived legitimacy will be particularly high when it has the power to make a recommendation, especially a recommendation to political representatives over a referendum.*

However, Fishkin points out that tyranny can be the consequence of policy non-decisions, as well as substantive decisions. If the existing political system already contains too many veto points, allowing one ideological perspective to block reasonable decisions, tyrannical outcomes may arise precisely because there are too many layers through which decisions must pass. In Chapter Three we observed that Northern Ireland's consociational system allows unionist or nationalist political parties to effectively block decisions, whereas those lacking a strong ethno-national position are left without such veto power. Therefore, individuals with a more moderate ethno-national outlook are more likely to feel threatened by non-decision-making caused by ethno-national vetoes, and less likely to feel threatened by a more expedient decision-making process that denies a veto based on ideological designation:

H3a: *Among individuals with a moderate, rather than a strong, ethno-national ideology, the perceived legitimacy of citizens' assembly decision-making will be particularly high when it has the power either to take a binding decision or to make a recommendation to be put to a referendum.*

H3b: *For these individuals, legitimacy will be particularly low when it has the power to make a recommendation to political representatives.*

Still, when it comes to societal groups in a deeply divided place, the group traditionally in the minority is likely to prefer an additional check on decisions made by the majority – even if it is a majority decision based on the considered preferences of a deliberative mini-public. In Northern Ireland, this leads us to expect that Catholic citizens will be more wary of a citizens' assembly with the power to take binding decisions, or with the ability to make a recommendation subject to the

endorsement of a simple majority of voters in a referendum. In contrast, Protestant citizens are expected to be less fearful of majority tyranny, and so should be generally more supportive of processes that enable a final decision to be taken by a simple majority of fellow citizens, either in the context of a mini-public or in a referendum:

H4a: *Among Catholics, the perceived legitimacy of citizens' assembly decision-making will be particularly high when it has the power to make a recommendation, especially a recommendation to political representatives over a referendum.*

H4b: *Among Protestants, the perceived legitimacy of citizens' assembly decision-making will be particularly high when it has the power either to take a binding decision or to make a recommendation to be put to a referendum.*

7.3 Study One

7.3.1 Data & Method

A non-random sample of 254 adults was recruited from an online panel of 40,000 members across the UK. A series of screening questions ensured that only residents of Northern Ireland were directed to a 10-minute online survey hosted by Opinium; non-residents were filtered out or directed to other surveys for which they were eligible. The study was conducted in late February and early March of 2018, in parallel to the process of recruitment and data collection for the initial studies reported in Chapter Five and Chapter Six. Respondents could only participate in a single study. Each participant received £0.50 in credit to their account as members of the survey panel.

Nature of Citizens' Assembly Decision		
[1] Binding decision by the citizens' assembly itself	**[2]** Recommendation to be put to the Northern Ireland Assembly	**[3] PROTOTYPICAL** Recommendation to be put to all voters in a referendum

Table 7.1: *Summary of experimental conditions in Study One*

The final sample was largely male (71 percent), but sufficiently diverse on the key variable of community background: 42 percent of respondents were Protestant, 33 percent Catholic, and 21 percent of respondents identified their community background with another or no religion. The average age was 47.1 years (*SD* = 14.6 years). Participants were randomly assigned to one of three groups, each of which received a different version of the survey. An opening vignette described how a citizens' assembly might hypothetically operate in the context of Northern Ireland, with the nature of the body's decision power manipulated for each group. Table 7.1 summarises the three conditions of the survey experiment.

In the first condition, presented to Group [1], respondents were told that the decision of the citizens' assembly would be binding. In other words, although the citizens' assembly would not formally have the legal authority to take decisions in the way that the Northern Ireland Assembly does, its statutory commissioning body would accept in advance to implement the decision of the citizens' assembly.[123] Respondents assigned to the other two conditions were told that the citizens' assembly would only be able to make a recommendation, either to be put to politicians in the Northern Ireland Assembly (for respondents in Group [2]) or to all

[123] In this condition the word 'final' is used to describe the decision. While no policy decision in a democratic political system can technically be protected from being overturned at a later point in time, the word 'final' is used simply to convey to respondents that no other body would subsequently reject the decision of the citizens' assembly in this context; that the decision amounts to more than a recommendation.

voters in a referendum (for respondents in Group [3]). In the present experiment, the third citizens' assembly condition is taken as the prototypical process of taking decisions. The manipulated text is shown in italics (see *Appendix E* for the three individual vignettes):

> In Northern Ireland, there are some issues on which elected politicians are divided over the way forward, notably on Irish language legislation.
>
> On the specific issue of an **Irish language policy**, it has been proposed that a citizens' assembly could decide on the way forward instead. The citizens' assembly would consist of a group of ordinary citizens that is representative of the whole population of Northern Ireland. Members would be randomly chosen, in the same way that legal juries are selected.
>
> The citizens' assembly would consider the existing policy disagreement, consider the evidence on different perspectives and different arguments, and then reach a decision on Irish language policy.
>
> [{ ***The decision would be final.*** *In other words, politicians would accept in advance the decision of the citizens' assembly and agree to implement it.* } { ***The decision would be a recommendation that would be put to the Northern Ireland Assembly.*** *In other words, politicians would have the final say on whether or not to implement the decision of the citizens' assembly.* } { ***The decision would be a recommendation that would be put to all voters in a referendum.*** *In other words, all citizens would have the final say on whether or not to implement the decision of the citizens' assembly. Politicians would agree in advance to implement this result.* }]

Note that while respondents were not presented with a specific decision, each condition did narrowly define the issue at stake: Irish language policy. By controlling for the type of issue being considered by the citizens' assembly, the

degree of issue salience was consistent across the three conditions.[124] By selecting the particular issue of Irish language policy, the study also maintains consistency with the survey experiment on decision acceptance in Chapter Four.

Respondents could only proceed to the survey items after spending at least 30 seconds on the screen containing the vignette. They were then asked to indicate their reaction to the hypothetical citizens' assembly based on what they had read about it. Replicating the measurement of the outcome variable in the studies presented in Chapters Five and Six, respondents evaluated the citizens' assembly on a series of ten items, each with the same seven-point scale.[125] A mean score from the multi-item scale provided an overall measure of perceived legitimacy. Respondents' perceptions on the extent to which the process was *fair*, *trustworthy*, *democratic*, *efficient*, *even-handed*, *acceptable*, *good*, *competent*, *supportable*, and *credible* were equally weighted.[126] The final ten-item scale was unidimensional with a high degree of internal consistency ($\alpha = .97$).[127] In the analysis that follows, the scale is calibrated to run from 0 to 6 to facilitate interpretation. One question was embedded in the survey as a manipulation check, asking respondents to recall the nature of the decision mentioned in the vignette.[128]

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[124] Other elements of citizens' assembly design are held constant across the three conditions, including the selection of members and the (narrowly specified) process of deliberation.

[125] The full wording of the question was: "Imagine the way in which a citizens' assembly would deal with a political issue. As a way of making a decision, to what extent do you think this process would be … fair or unfair; trustworthy or untrustworthy; democratic or undemocratic; efficient or inefficient; even-handed or discriminatory; acceptable or unacceptable; good or bad; competent or incompetent; supportable or unsupportable; credible or not credible?" For each of the ten items there were seven response options on a bipolar scale, for example: 'extremely' (fair), 'mostly' (fair), 'slightly' (fair), 'neither' (fair nor unfair), 'slightly' (unfair), 'mostly' (unfair), and 'extremely' (unfair). See *Appendix E* for the full questionnaire.

[126] See Chapter Five for a more detailed discussion on the construction of the multi-item scale measuring perceived legitimacy, including an explanation of the items included and excluded.

[127] For factor analysis and reliability statistics, refer to *Appendix H.*

[128] After respondents answered questions measuring to the outcome variable, they were asked, "How is the decision of the citizens' assembly described?" The response options were 'the decision would be final', 'the decision would be a recommendation that would be put to the Northern Ireland Assembly' and 'the decision would be a recommendation that would be put to all voters in a referendum'.

Potential moderators of the relationship between the nature of citizens' assembly decisions and perceived legitimacy were measured with single survey items. Ethno-national ideology was recorded on a standard five-point bipolar scale; respondents indicated their community background from a familiar set of nominal categories. The survey also captured support for the democratic value of non-tyranny, measured on a five-point unipolar scale on which respondents indicated the extent to which they think it is important "that decisions do not discriminate against a particular group." In the context of taking decisions, the simple wording of the question captures the essence of non-tyranny without introducing the relatively abstract (and, therefore, potentially unclear) term itself. The full list of questions and response categories can be found in *Appendix E*.

7.3.2 Results

As Figure 7.1 illustrates, a prototypical citizens' assembly making a recommendation on Irish language policy, to be put to voters in a referendum, received the highest mean legitimacy score (M =3.50, SD = 1.50). A citizens' assembly making a recommendation to the Northern Ireland Assembly received a similar score (M = 3.45, SD = 1.56). A citizens' assembly taking a binding decision on Irish language policy was evaluated slightly less positively, with a mean legitimacy score of 3.13 (SD = 1.84). However, the overall effect of decision-taking process on the outcome variable across the experimental conditions is not statistically significant ($F(2, 251) = 1.32$, $p = .27$).

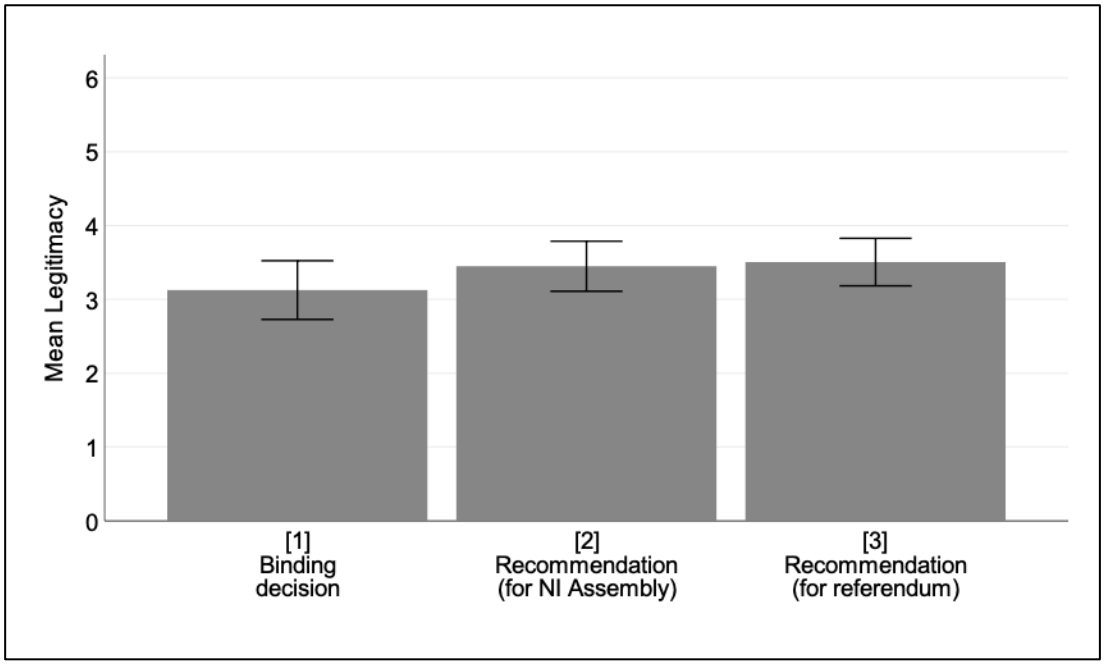


Figure 7.1: *Perceived legitimacy of citizens' assemblies with different decision-making processes*

So far, this analysis constitutes an inadequate test of the main hypotheses, H1a and H1b. Unlike the initial studies presented in Chapters Five and Six, Table 7.2 shows that a majority of respondents passed the manipulation check in each condition. However, the overall pass rate of 63 percent cannot be described as resounding, and the distribution of pass rates varied across the experimental groups; $\chi 2$ (2, $N = 254$) = 5.26, $p < .10$. In Group [1], most respondents correctly reported that the citizens' assembly decision would be final but a significant minority (46 percent) responded that it would be a recommendation. In Groups [2] and [3] the pass rate was much higher: nearly 70 percent of respondents recognised the decision to be a recommendation to be put either to the Northern Ireland Assembly or to a referendum, as appropriate. However, even in these groups, nearly one in four respondents failed to correctly identify the destination of the recommendation (see Figure 7.2).

	[1] Binding decision	[2] Recommendation for NI Assembly	[3] Recommendation for referendum	All groups
Pass	53.6	69.0	67.4	63.4
Fail	46.4	31.0	32.6	36.6
Totals	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 7.2: *Respondents passing or failing manipulation checks in Study One (%)*

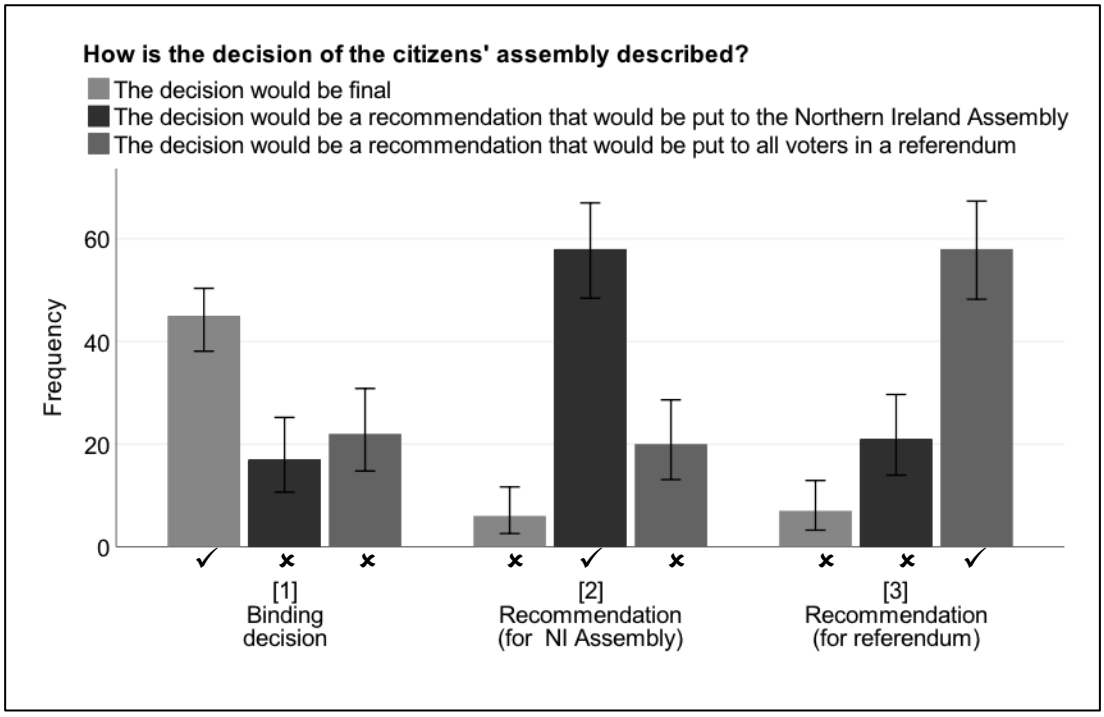


Figure 7.2: *Responses to the manipulation check: "How is the decision of the citizens' assembly described?"*

The substantive conclusion holds when respondents failing the manipulation check are dropped from the analysis, leaving 161 valid cases.[129] However, excluding 93 respondents from the analysis reduces statistical power, increasing the probability of making a Type II error. Moreover, the uneven distribution of pass rates across the experimental conditions is problematic. Therefore, before accepting the null

[129] See Tables A24 and A25 in *Appendix H* for alternative analyses.

hypothesis, it would be preferable to repeat the experiment with discernible modifications to the manipulations. Above all, a more effective experiment would need to better emphasise the binding nature of the citizens' assembly decision in the first condition. The remaining manipulations should be as clear as possible on the destination of the recommendations of a citizens' assembly, avoiding confusion among respondents as to whether the decision proceeds to either the Northern Ireland Assembly or to all voters in a referendum. Replicating the iterative approach adopted in Chapters Five and Six, this initial study is repeated and refined.

7.4 Study Two

7.4.1 Data & Method

In a follow-up study, 291 participants were recruited from an online panel hosted by LucidTalk – in parallel to the follow-up experiments presented in Chapters Six and Seven.[130] Data collection took place in the first week of June 2018; as a standard incentive, all panel members who took part in the study earned reward points that they could subsequently redeem in regular prize draws. The non-random sample contained a healthy distribution across categories of community background: 46 percent of respondents came from a Catholic background, 33 percent from a Protestant background, and 19 percent did not identify their background with either of the two communities. While Catholic respondents were over-represented in the sample, as were male respondents (at 78 percent), such a demographic skew is relatively unproblematic given the experimental design of the study.

[130] The panel is hosted by LucidTalk, a survey company based in Northern Ireland. Participants were recruited to this experiment in parallel to Study Two in Chapter Five and Study Two in Chapter Six. Participants were randomly assigned to only one condition across all three experiments, meaning that it was not possible to participate in more than one of the parallel experiments.

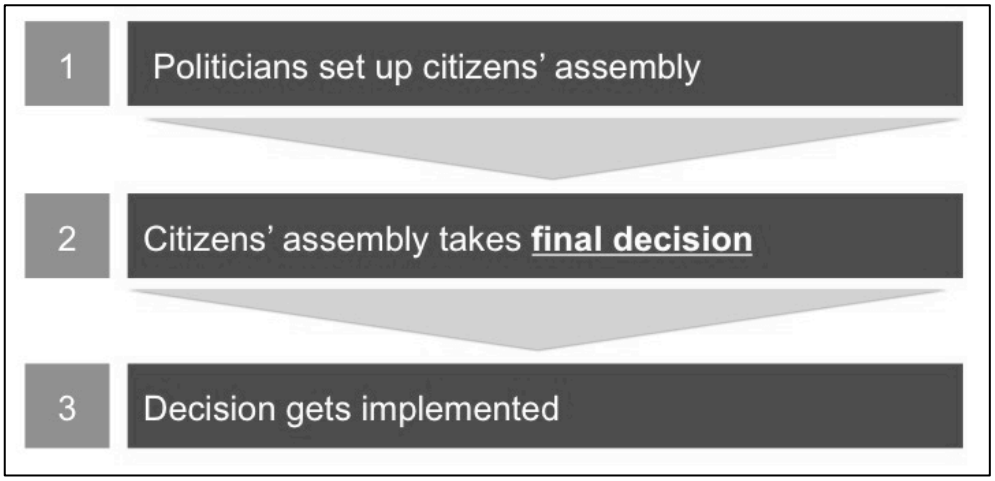
The experiment is designed such that it broadly replicates Study One. The same vignettes are used in the three respective conditions, to which respondents were randomly assigned; the outcome variable was measured using the same multi-item scale of legitimacy;[131] the hypothesised moderating variables of the perceived importance of non-tyranny, ethno-national identity, and community background were measured using the same survey instruments; and respondents were still asked to evaluate the decision-making process of the Northern Ireland Assembly on the same items on which they evaluated the decision-making process of the respective citizens' assembly presented.[132]

Where the second experiment differs is with respect to the presentation of each manipulation and the placement of the manipulation check associated with it. Echoing the follow-up experiments in Chapters Six and Seven, an infographic was created for each condition, taking the form of a simple flow-chart. Unlike the infographics used in experiments of the previous chapters, the infographics of this study rely heavily on text (see Figure 7.3). However, the visualisation of the decision-taking steps helps to reinforce the key elements of their sequential nature. Immediately after being presented with the vignette and accompanying infographic, respondents were asked to recall the nature of the citizens' assembly decision: would it be final, would it be a recommendation to be put to the Northern Ireland Assembly, or would it be a recommendation to be put to all voters in a referendum? If a respondent gave an incorrect response, he or she was informed and prompted to return to the page containing the vignette and infographic.

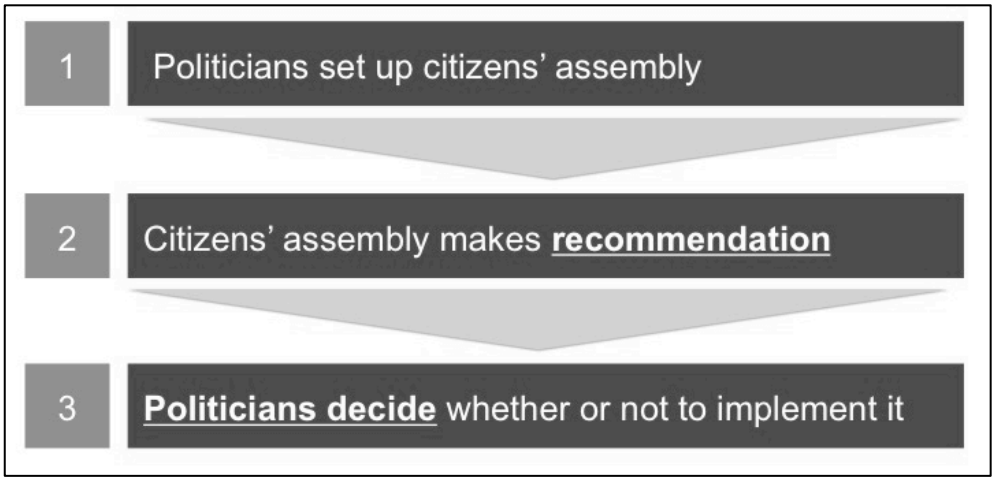
[131] There was a slight change of wording for one of the items: instead of being asked the extent to which respondents thought the process described would be 'credible' or 'not credible', they were asked the extent to which they thought it would be 'credible' or 'uncredible'. The latter is not a commonly used word, but it is easily comprehendible.

[132] In both studies, respondents were asked to, "Think about the Northern Ireland Assembly at Stormont." For Study Two the words, "when it is functioning," were added to emphasise the relevance of the questions despite Northern Ireland's devolved institutions not operating at the time.

[1]



[2]



[3]

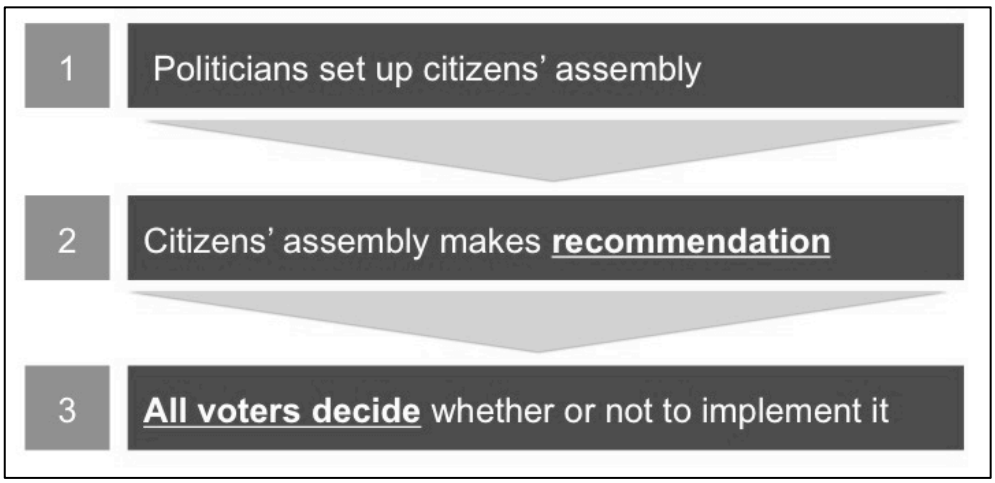


Figure 7.3: *Infographics from the three experimental conditions*

7.4.2 Results

A high proportion of respondents passed the manipulation check in each of the experimental conditions (see Figure 7.4). In Group [1], 91 percent of respondents correctly reported that the citizens' assembly decision was described as final; in Group [2], 92 percent reported that it would be a recommendation put to the Northern Ireland Assembly; and in Group [3], 91 percent reported that it would be a recommendation to be put to a referendum. The overall pass rate of 91 percent was uniform across all three groups, indicating no significant differences in the ability of respondents to identify the manipulated feature of each decision-taking process described ($\chi 2$ (2, N = 291) = .15, p = .93). In the analysis that follows, only those passing the manipulation check are included.[133]

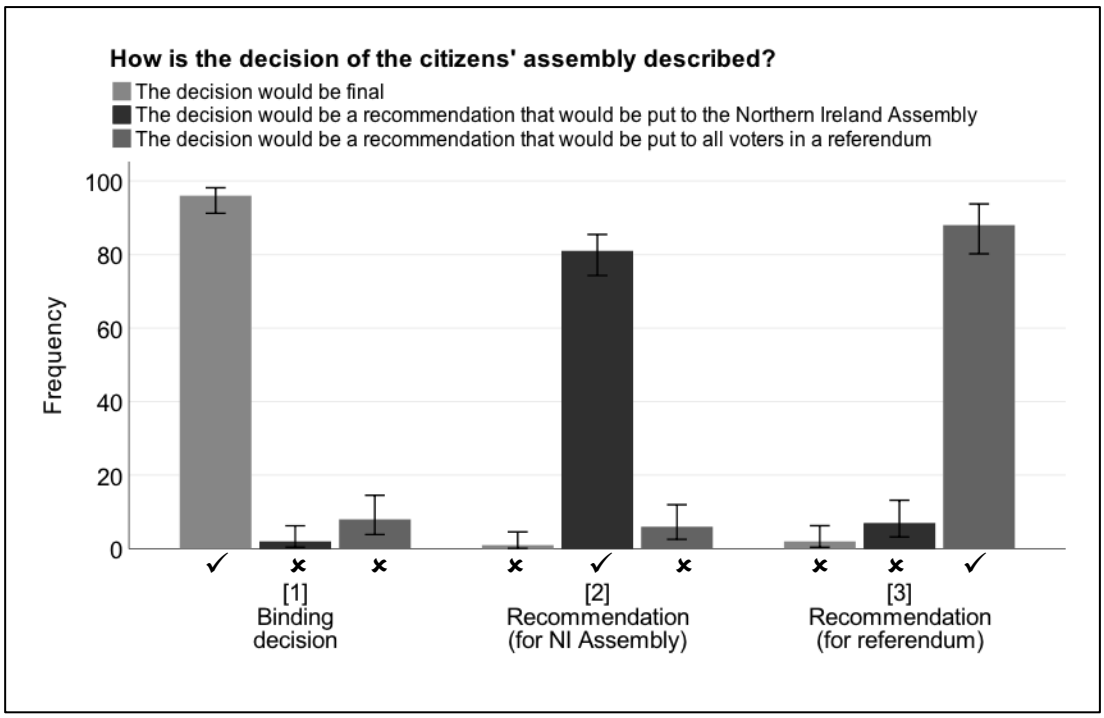


Figure 7.4: *Responses to the manipulation check: "How is the decision of the citizens' assembly described?"*

[133] This leaves 265 valid cases in total. An alternative analysis was conducted on the full sample of 291 participants and is presented in *Appendix H*. The two analyses yield the same overall conclusions.

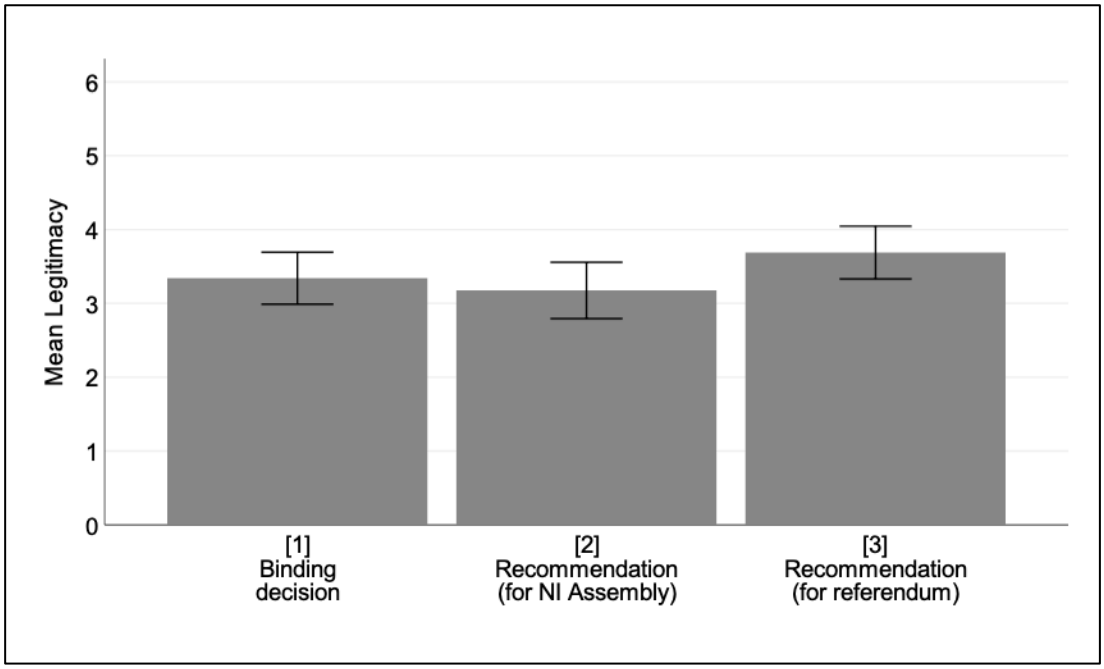


Figure 7.5: *Mean legitimacy scores of each model of citizens' assembly*

Overall, the nature of citizens' assembly decision-taking has no direct effect on the perceived legitimacy of the process, at least under the specific conditions of this experiment ($F(2, 262) = 2.00$, $p = 1.38$). Respondents perceived a process in which a citizens' assembly took a binding decision on an Irish language policy ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 1.74$) to be just as legitimate as a prototypical process featuring a recommendation to be put to voters in a referendum ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 1.68$). However, as Figure 7.5 illustrates, a process in which a citizens' assembly makes a recommendation to the Northern Ireland Assembly was regarded as the least legitimate model ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 1.72$). Compared to the prototypical model, the mean legitimacy score for this model is significantly lower (albeit at the $p < .10$ level). The first hypothesis is, therefore, only partially rejected.

Alongside this aggregate result, the experiment yielded a significant moderating effect at the individual level. Respondents were asked on the extent to which they thought it was important that decisions should be taken in accordance

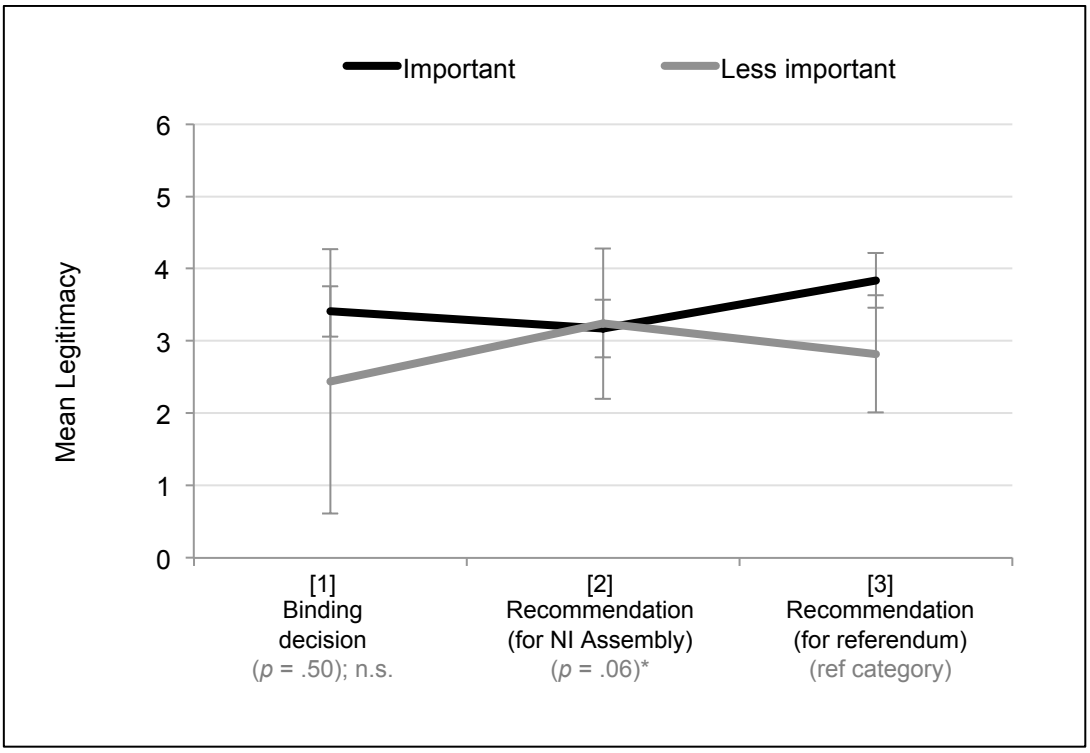


Figure 7.6: *Mean legitimacy scores of each model of citizens' assembly, by perceived importance of non-tyranny*

with the democratic principle of non-tyranny.[134] Among the large proportion of respondents who considered it to be mostly or very important that decisions do not discriminate against a particular group, the prototypical decision-taking process received the highest mean legitimacy score (M = 3.84, SD = 1.68), providing some evidence in support of H2b. However, the mean score is not significantly lower when the citizens' assembly has the power to take a binding decision (M = 3.41; SD = 1.67), causing us to reject H2a. In contrast, as Figure 8.6 shows, the perceived legitimacy of a citizens' assembly *was* significantly lower among these individuals when it produced a recommendation for the Northern Ireland Assembly (M = 3.17, SD = 1.76). Among individuals who placed less importance on the democratic

[134] When asked how important it was "that decisions do not discriminate against a particular group," the vast majority of respondents (90 percent) said it was 'mostly' or 'very' important. The remaining 10 percent of respondents said that it was only 'somewhat', 'not very' or 'not at all' important.

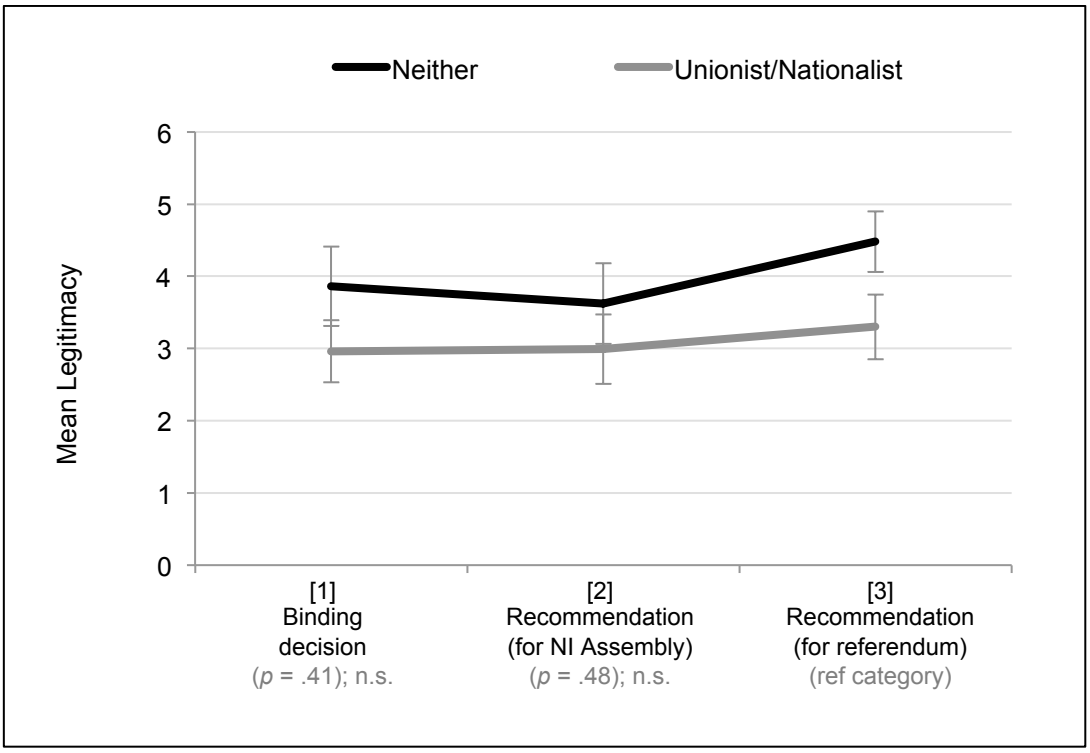


Figure 7.7: *Mean legitimacy scores of each model of citizens' assembly, by ethno-national ideology*

principle of non-tyranny, it was precisely this decision-taking process that was perceived to be *most* legitimate (M = 3.24, SD = 1.40). A process involving a citizens' assembly producing a recommendation to be put to a referendum – the prototypical model – received a lower mean legitimacy score by one unit compared to those who value non-tyranny as an important decision-taking principle (M = 2.83, SD = 1.73). This difference in the magnitude of the effect across these two levels is significant (at the $p < .10$ level).[135]

A moderating effect was also tested for different levels of ethno-national ideology. Those identifying as neither unionist nor nationalist consistently perceived each model of citizens' assembly to be more legitimate than individuals identifying as unionist or nationalist. (see Figure 7.7). The former group of individuals scored

[135] Full regression analysis is presented in *Appendix H*.

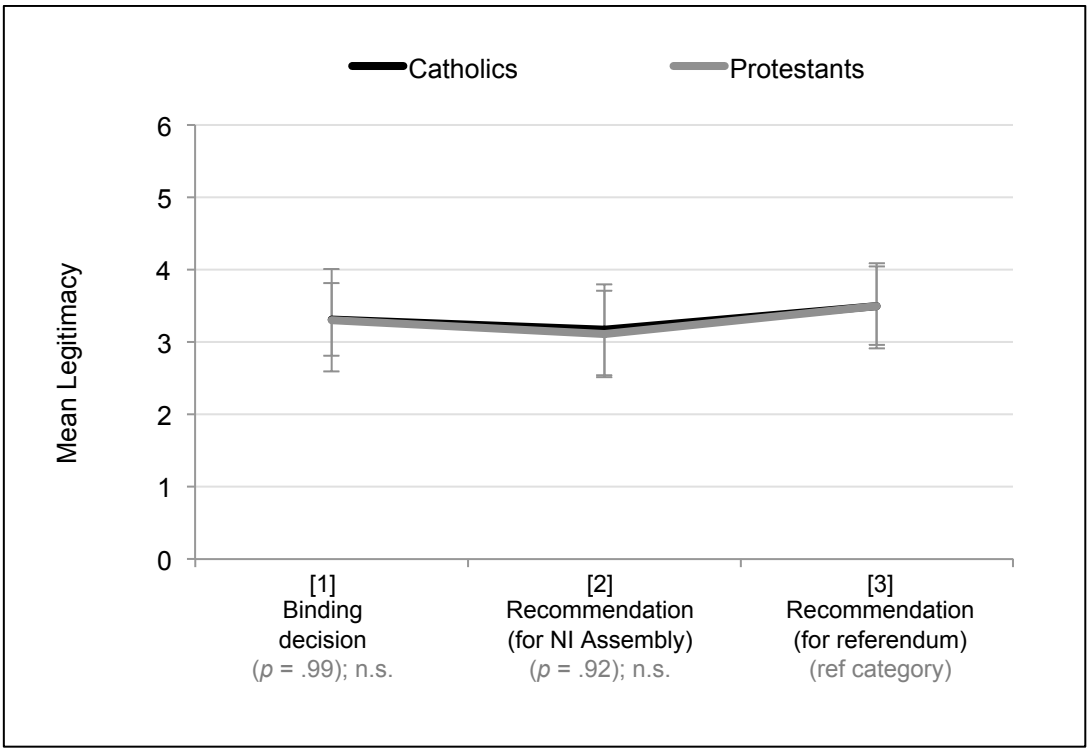


Figure 7.8: *Mean legitimacy scores of each model of citizens' assembly, by community background*

each model on the upper end of the 7-point legitimacy scale, on average; the latter group of individuals converged around the midpoint (recalling that 0 represents the lowest possible score, 6 the highest). However, the magnitude of these individual-level differences does not vary significantly across the experimental conditions, thus disconfirming H3a and H3b.

Perhaps even more strikingly, the mean legitimacy scores for Protestant and Catholic respondents did not vary between *or* within the experimental groups; the two groups are indistinguishable in Figure 7.8.[136] It had been hypothesised that members of a traditional minority community would perceive decision-taking processes differently to members of a traditional majority community, with the

[136] Among Catholic respondents, the mean legitimacy scores were 3.31 (*SD* = 1.78) in Group [1], 3.17 (*SD* = 1.82) in Group [2], and 3.50 (*SD* = 1.88) in Group [3]. Among Protestant respondents, perceived legitimacy averaged 3.30 (*SD* = 1.75) in Group [1], 3.11 (*SD* = 1.79) in Group [2], and 3.51 (*SD* = 1.69) in Group [3].

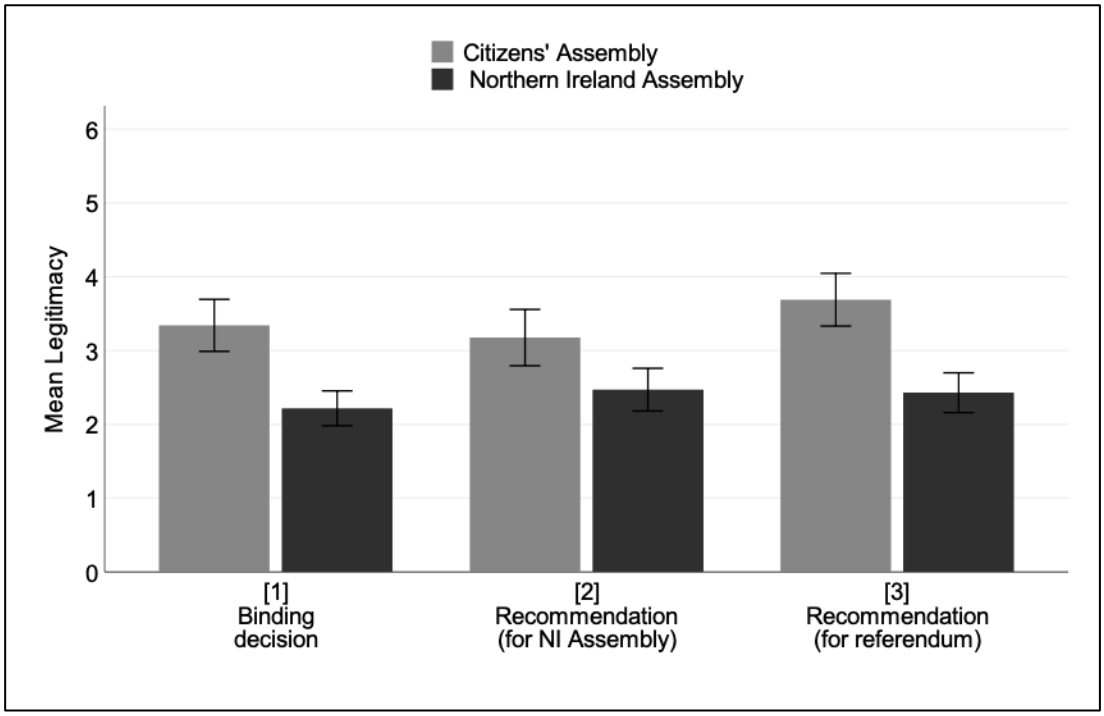


Figure 7.9: *Mean legitimacy scores of each model of citizens' assembly compared to mean legitimacy scores for the Northern Ireland Assembly*

former (Catholic respondents) perceiving a recommendation for the Northern Ireland Assembly to be most legitimate process and the latter (Protestant respondents) to perceive a recommendation for a referendum to be a particularly legitimate mode of taking decisions. This is clearly not the case, and so H4a and H4b are rejected.

With only a modest direct effect at the aggregate level, and with only one significant moderating effect at the individual level, a further test of the robustness of the experiment is necessary – beyond an initial check to establish whether or not respondents successfully identified the key manipulation of each experimental condition. As a point of reference, respondents were asked to consider the way in which the Northern Ireland Assembly makes decisions (when it is functioning), and to evaluate its process of reaching decisions on the same multi-item scale on which respondents had evaluated the model of citizens' assembly described in each condition. Figure 7.9 presents the mean scores for the citizens' assembly and

Northern Ireland Assembly alongside each other. Consistent with the lack of any theoretical basis for a relationship between this second outcome variable and the manipulated variable, it shows the absence of variation in the mean legitimacy scores for the Northern Ireland Assembly across each group. Crucially, however, we do see significant and consistent variation in the mean legitimacy scores for the Northern Ireland Assembly against each model of citizens' assembly. This mirrors the findings of Chapters Six and Seven, and adds a considerable weight of reassurance that respondents meaningfully engaged with the task of evaluation. Once again, we have good reason to expect that citizens' assemblies can add value to the perceived legitimacy of the democratic process in Northern Ireland.

7.5 Discussion & Conclusion

The central goal of this thesis is to investigate the potential for deliberative mini-publics to strengthen the democratic quality of a political system – not by replacing existing institutions, but by complementing them. This chapter has addressed a simple, yet fundamental, question: if a citizens' assembly were to be established alongside existing institutions, how much authority should it have, in its own right, for it to be considered a legitimate element of the democratic process? Based purely on real-world practice to date, the resounding answer would appear to be 'not very much' – providing some reassurance to critics of mini-publics (see Lafont, 2015). Beyond Ancient Greece, modern citizens' assemblies have generally only had the power to produce recommendations, albeit with the qualified exception of the

Gdańsk Citizens' Assembly.[137] Instead, their generally non-binding outputs have been used to inform those with the authority to take decisions – either elected representatives in a legislature or voters in a referendum. From the perspective of citizens themselves, however, this caution around the decision power of citizens' assemblies appears to be excessive. The evidence presented in this chapter shows that a process in which a citizens' assembly has the power to take a binding decision on a contested issue is perceived to be just as legitimate as one in which it has the (limited) power to make a recommendation.

This finding is particularly significant in the context of a deeply divided polity, where part of the rationale for establishing a citizens' assembly in the first place may be precisely to help unlock gridlock – non-decision-making – in other parts of the political system. In Northern Ireland, contestation over Irish language legislation has contributed to the collapse of the devolved legislature and power-sharing government, as well as the protracted difficulty in restoring them. If political parties continue to be unable to reach a substantive agreement on the issue, after a repeated series of negotiations, they may eventually reach a collective conclusion that another decision-making vehicle, such as a citizens' assembly, is needed to settle the issue and break the impasse. In such a scenario, it would be logical for the parties to agree in advance to implement the decision of the citizens' assembly, irrespective of the decision itself. If there were no such binding commitment to begin with, there would be a significant risk that the political parties would simply ignore any proposal emerging from the citizens' assembly, at least those parties ending up in substantive disagreement with its considered recommendation.

[137] Recall that the decisions of the Gdańsk Citizens' Assembly were only considered binding if they were supported by at least 80 percent of its members, and that this decision rule was based on a *political* commitment by the city's mayor as opposed to any formal *legal* requirement.

Similarly, if the mini-public recommendation were put to all voters in a referendum, there is a risk that political parties would still ignore the decision. Taking this avenue, perhaps a greater danger lies in the potential for a referendum campaign on such a contentious issue to have an intensely polarising effect on an already deeply divided polity. Even if a representative sample of citizens were able to successfully and respectfully consider a conflict-ridden issue in a non-partisan, deliberative setting, there is no guarantee that high-quality mini-public deliberation would be replicated at the level of the maxi-public. However, even in a deeply divided polity, it is notable that referendums are still associated with powerful democratic qualities. In Chapter Four we saw clear evidence that an unfavourable decision on Irish language policy was significantly more likely to be *accepted* than one taken either by a more conventional mode of decision-making or by a citizens' assembly. This was mainly attributable to differences at the individual-level: an unfavourable decision taken by voters in a referendum was significantly more likely to be accepted by those holding the strongest ethno-national ideological views, compared to decisions taken in other ways.

Historically, a majoritarian instrument like a referendum may have been regarded as a largely inappropriate device for decision-making in Northern Ireland, given the systematic advantage likely to be enjoyed by one group at the expense of another. More recently, however, the demographic profile of Northern Ireland has been changing. Catholics and Protestants are *both* minority groups, and recent Assembly election results have perhaps reinforced this reality on the dimension of ethno-national ideology. In 2017, unionists were without a majority of seats in a

devolved Northern Ireland legislature for the first time since the polity's inception.[138] This may help to explain why, contrary to our initial hypotheses, a process involving a popular vote on a citizens' assembly recommendation is seen as particularly legitimate among those who value the democratic principle of non-tyranny, *and* that such a process is seen as equally legitimate by each of the two traditional communities.

In practice, perhaps the bluntest effects of a referendum campaign could be mitigated if the popular vote is informed by the output of a robust citizens' assembly decision-making process (Gastil and Richards, 2013). Fournier *et al.* (2011) show that among citizens who were aware of the activity of the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly were significantly more likely to vote in favour of its recommendation in the subsequent referendum. Suiter (2018) found a similar effect in the Republic of Ireland, illustrating the constructive potential for mini-public deliberation to help inform voters in the maxi-public as they weigh up competing options ahead of a referendum. Indeed, in the Irish referendum on the constitutionality of abortion, a particularly emotive issue, the campaign itself was marked by a relative degree of civility – attributed in part to the deliberation undertaken by the 99 members of the Irish Citizens' Assembly two years beforehand (*ibid*).

Still, it is notable that in both British Columbia and the Republic of Ireland, political parties either played a muted role during the referendum campaign, or else displayed little opposition to the substantive mini-public recommendations (Warren and Pearse, 2008; Field, 2018). It may be harder to imagine that political parties would display such deference to the output of a mini-public in a more polarised

[138] After the 2017 Northern Ireland Assembly election, 44 percent of members designated as unionist, down from 52 percent in the previous mandate. Similarly, 43 percent of members designated as nationalist, up from 37 percent. The proportion of 'others' was virtually unchanged, rising to 12 percent from 11 percent.

political climate on a more intensely contested issue. However, if political parties at least collectively express their support for the process *in advance* of it being established, taking an oppositional position on the substantive outcome may have a limited effect on the overall perceived legitimacy of the process, while at the same time laying the conditions for the broader political system to function more smoothly. Moreover, political parties may also be more likely to lend their *a priori* support to such a process if they knew that a referendum would serve as a check on any 'bad' mini-public decision.

Alternatively, a more cautiously designed process could give political representatives explicit control over the outcome itself. Under this design, the Northern Ireland Assembly could formally accept or reject the recommendation of a citizens' assembly. Leaving aside political calculations, such a process may be justified on the grounds that the decisions reached by either a mini-public or a referendum could have tyrannical consequences, especially if they rest on the support of a simple majority. In other words, Northern Ireland's consociational institutions would be able to disregard a mini-public decision that threatened the essential interests of a certain group, reflecting the anti-majoritarian logic of a system seeking to protect group interests.

And yet, it is striking that among those who value non-tyranny as a democratic principle, the perceived legitimacy of mini-public decision-making is significantly lower when the Northern Ireland Assembly serves as a check on the mini-public decision. On the contrary, it is higher among those who consider non-tyranny to be a relatively unimportant democratic principle. This finding casts doubt on the rationale underpinning Northern Ireland's consociational system of government: if it is designed to enhance the legitimacy of decision-making through

an explicit commitment to non-tyranny, its unique ability to perform this role does not appear to be recognised by citizens themselves. Indeed, compared to the way respondents evaluated the way the Northern Ireland Assembly usually takes decisions, each of the three models of citizens' assembly described in this chapter were perceived to be more legitimate.

Overall, these findings suggest that citizens' assemblies could enhance, rather than weaken, the legitimacy of decision-making in a political system weighed down by crisis and popular dissatisfaction. To follow conventional wisdom, such a mini-public would have the power to make a recommendation, serving as a check on its authority and helping to prevent it from delivering tyrannical decisions. But if we take seriously Fishkin's contention that tyrannical outcomes can arise from policy *omission* as well as policy *co*mmission, we need to consider how political paralysis can be legitimately overcome. The results of this chapter suggest that a citizens' assembly with the power to take a binding decision on a contested political issue would be perceived to be just as legitimate as one with the power only to make a recommendation. There may be good reasons for limiting the power of a citizens' assembly, but concern that an authoritative mini-public would be perceived to be illegitimate by the maxi-public should not be one of them. Similarly, there may be good reasons for designing a multi-level decision-making procedure to help guard against harmful decisions, but such considerations must be weighed against the tyranny of non-decision-making when existing procedures grind to an indefinite halt.

Chapter Eight

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

IMPLICATIONS & POSSIBILITIES FOR DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

Mission Control: Odyssey, Houston. I have your final entry pad when you are ready.

Apollo 13: Okay, Houston. Ready to copy.

Radio communication between Mission Control and Apollo 13 Commander Jim Lovell, 17 April 1970 (NASA, 1970: 751)

This thesis has addressed the potential for citizens' assemblies, as an application of deliberative democracy, to address democratic deficits. In a political system diagnosed with this problem, can citizens' assemblies serve as a control mechanism to help improve its democratic performance? Taking the deeply divided polity of Northern Ireland as a case study, the cumulative weight of evidence from a series of empirical studies suggests that, from the perspective of the maxi-public, citizens' assemblies can indeed play a constructive role.

Starting with a cross-sectional analysis, this thesis finds that there is deep and widespread support for the idea of citizens' assemblies supplementing the existing political system in the event of a crisis. There are largely favourable attitudes on the capacity of ordinary people to be selected to serve as members, on the likelihood of

members making decisions for the benefit of everyone, and on citizens' assemblies playing some sort of formal role ahead of political decisions being taken. Compared to a more conventional response to crisis involving political elites (through cross-party talks), support for a citizens' assembly is particularly high among individuals with low levels of trust in political parties. Compared to an alternative way of involving citizens directly in decision-making (through a referendum), support for a more deliberative approach is particularly high among non-voters. These findings suggest that citizens' assemblies have a unique potential to target some of the main weaknesses of consociational systems, especially the intensely partisan process of decision-making and the institutional obstacles that undermine substantive inclusion. Crucially, a follow-up survey experiment finds that aggregate support for citizens' assemblies is robust. Even when they are presented with an unfavourable decision on an ethno-nationally sensitive policy issue, respondents are just as likely to *accept* the decision of a citizens' assembly compared to a decision taken in a more conventional way, with the exception of a referendum. In other words, losers' consent, a crucial requirement in any democracy, extends to decisions produced by this relatively novel type of democratic innovation (Anderson *et al.* 2005).

A further series of online experiments found that different ways of designing citizens' assemblies – in their processes of selecting members, decision-making, and taking decisions – had generally no effect on overall perceptions of their legitimacy. Aggregate levels of perceived legitimacy were high irrespective of whether the selection mechanism was by random lottery (sortition) or election, whether members were exclusively citizens or a mixture of lay citizens and elected politicians, whether deliberation was external or internal, or whether the citizens' assembly produced a recommendation or a binding decision. There were, however, some important

differences at the individual-level, suggesting some trade-offs in design features for those who value particular democratic principles, and those who hold stronger versus more moderate ethno-national views. As a further design consideration for deeply divided contexts, there are also some models of citizens' assembly that have the potential to attract similarly high levels of perceived legitimacy on a cross-community basis, helping to reduce the risk of asymmetrical evaluations of the process from different groups. The findings of this research have implications for the governance of post-conflict Northern Ireland, for constitutional engineering in other deeply divided places, and for future research in the broad field of deliberative democracy.

8.1 A Citizens' Assembly for Northern Ireland?

At the time of writing, Northern Ireland has been without a devolved government for over two years. Arguably the time has passed when the problem was simply a democratic deficit, serious as it was; instead, the challenge has escalated into a deeper political vacuum – with no obvious or straightforward way out. After an Assembly election in March 2017 and five rounds of cross-party talks, political leaders have been unable, or unwilling, to form a new power-sharing government. The looming prospect of the UK's departure from the European Union – widely expected to cause particular challenges for Northern Ireland – has reduced the incentives for political parties to re-enter an administration that looks set to confront a fresh crisis.[139] Meanwhile, the UK's minority government has been visibly reluctant to introduce direct rule from Westminster – constrained by a confidence

[139] Northern Ireland will be the only part of the UK to share a land border with the EU once it leaves; given Northern Ireland's recent history, there are particular sensitivities over the possible erection of any physical infrastructure along the Irish border.

and supply agreement with Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party, as well as the likely disapproval of the Irish government in Dublin.[140] In the protracted absence of political leadership, public services are continuing to operate under the interim management of civil servants, whose scope of action is legally limited. Such an arrangement is as unsustainable as it is undemocratic.

Against such an intolerable backdrop, citizens might be expected to vent their collective dismay by taking direct action *en masse*: signing petitions, organising social media campaigns, and participating in peaceful protests. And yet, the voices of civil society have been conspicuous for their overwhelming silence. On 28 August 2018, when Northern Ireland surpassed Belgium's 589-day record for the longest period without a government, thousands of people attended 'We Deserve Better' rallies across 14 towns and cities (Halliday, 2018).[141] These rallies witnessed vocal yet dignified displays of frustration, but they failed to generate enough momentum to convert popular grievances into a more enduring, formidable movement. This raises a crucial, and uncomfortable, question: even if people widely think they 'deserve better', do they ultimately perceive the restoration of Northern Ireland's democratic institutions to be 'better' than a power vacuum? Have their negative evaluations of the performance of the political system undermined people's underlying commitment to the system itself? Here we recall Easton's (1965) distinction between specific and diffuse support, noting an important qualification: the "frustration of expectations can so jolt the deeper loyalties of the members of a system that their diffuse support falls into a precipitous decline" (Easton, 1975: 445). Northern Ireland is edging very close to confirming the hypothesis.

[140] In the June 2017 general election, the Conservatives lost their majority in the House of Commons. They rely on the DUP's ten MPs to stay in power.
[141] Since Northern Ireland is a devolved region, not a sovereign territory, the two cases are not directly comparable. That said, the UK government has so far refused to introduce direct rule.

Political leaders were aware of citizens' mounting disapproval *before* Northern Ireland's democratic institutions collapsed. In 2014, the then First Minister, Peter Robinson, himself said the institutions were "no longer fit for purpose," adding:

> We urgently need to take steps towards improving the operation of the democratic institutions and maintaining the respect and support of the electorate. We all need to reimagine the way forward (Robinson, 2014).

What does a re-imagined way forward look like? Does it rely on political elites simply engaging with existing institutions in a different way, or does it involve a bolder approach that creates new types of decision-makers in a new type of institution? In the subsequent Fresh Start Agreement (NIO, 2015: 67), the main parties acknowledged the need to "proactively engage with civic society" in a reformed political process. With faint echoes of the abandoned Civic Forum, the Agreement proposed a new 'Compact Civic Advisory Panel' to ensure that "civic voices are heard and civic views are considered in relation to key *social, cultural and economic issues*" (*ibid*: 38; emphasis added). However, its terms of reference strikingly preclude any *political* purpose, while the number and nature of appointments to the new body – six representatives chosen by the First and deputy First Minister – indicate a missed opportunity to display ambition and imagination. If the goal is to help bridge the gap between citizens and their political system, a more ambitious vehicle must go far beyond cosmetic gesturing.

The time has come for political representatives to consider the potential for a citizens' assembly to help re-invigorate, and subsequently complement, Northern Ireland's dormant democratic institutions. This proposal involves two related stages.

First, in the short-term, a citizens' assembly could help overcome the immediate issues that are causing gridlock among elites. A draft agreement between the main political parties in February 2018, which was abandoned but widely reported in the media, suggests the main points of contention fall under three categories: improving the operation of the Assembly and Executive; respecting languages and culture; and rights and respect (Mallie, 2018).

These issues range from technical aspects of government procedure to broader questions of principle. Given their centrality to the re-establishment of devolved governance, and given the structural orientation of some of the issues, an ensuing citizens' assembly could effectively serve as a constitutional convention, or at least form part of such a process of democratic renewal. The pioneering British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on electoral reform demonstrated the capacity for this kind of mini-public to constructively engage with complex, technical matters in a comprehensive manner (Warren and Pearse, 2008), while subsequent citizens' assemblies have broadly confirmed their suitability to the constitutional domain (Reuchamps and Suiter, 2016). All of the main political parties have indicated that *some* kind of reform is needed to the way Northern Ireland's democratic institutions operate. A citizens' assembly may be the most appropriate way of addressing what these reforms should be.

Second, in the longer-term, citizens' assemblies could further enhance the day-to-day democratic performance of Northern Ireland's consociational institutions once they are restored. Or, more appropriately, they could be used on a more regular basis alongside representative institutions *if* such an idea were endorsed by an initial citizens' assembly tasked with considering possible reforms to governance in Northern Ireland. Other procedural changes to the system may be enough to inject

some improvement to the democratic performance of the Assembly and Executive. However, the present juncture affords an opportunity to go beyond minimal patchwork reforms and instead tackle the deeper question of citizens' expectations for a democratic system. Drawing on the empirical research of this thesis, Figure 8.1 reminds us that there are many possible configurations of citizens' assembly design that could receive a healthy degree of legitimacy from the perspective of the maxi-public. Crucially, each model considered was perceived to be more legitimate than the Northern Ireland Assembly when it is normally functioning. Moving beyond Northern Ireland's immediate crisis is one thing, but addressing chronic issues of democratic under-performance must be a related priority. The evidence suggests that citizens' assemblies can help to reduce this underlying democratic deficit.

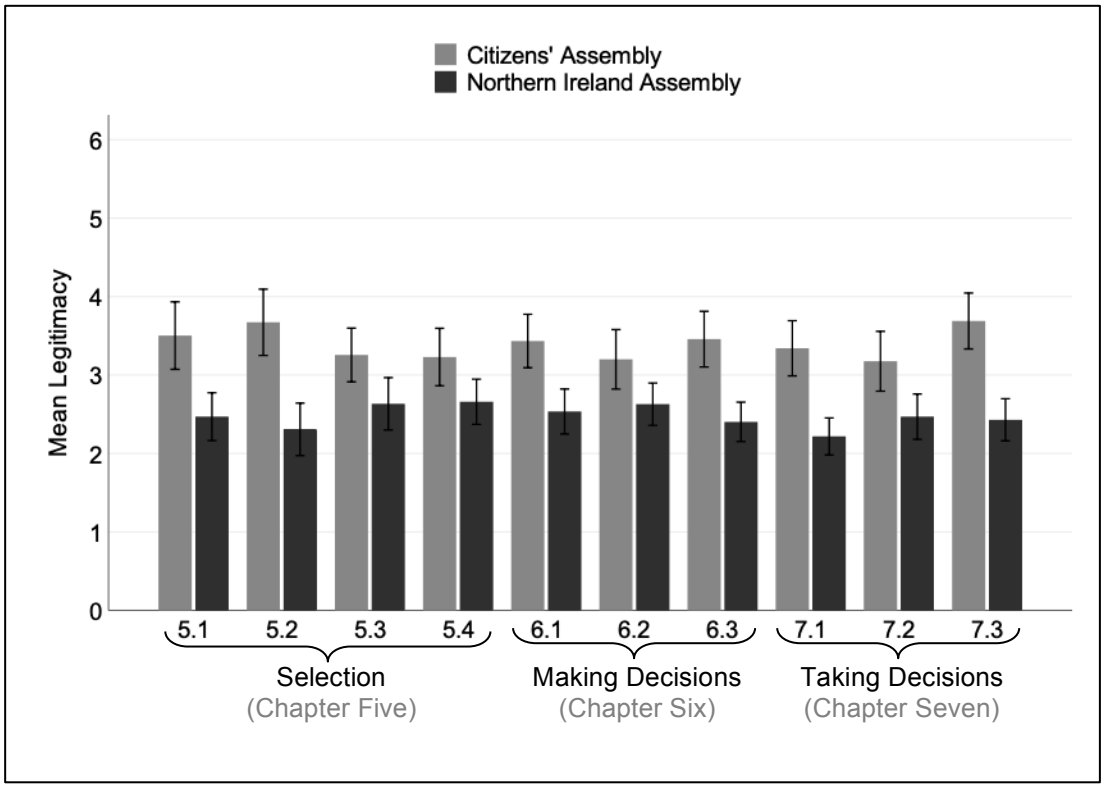


Figure 8.1: *Mean legitimacy scores for the Northern Ireland Assembly and each of the ten models of citizens' assembly examined in Chapters Five, Six and Seven*

The capacity for citizens' assemblies to control Northern Ireland's democratic deficit should not be overstated. This thesis has tested the *potential* for citizens' assemblies to do so via hypothetical, yet realistic, scenarios. Outside the control of a research environment, the precise way(s) in which mini-publics interact with the broader political system and, indeed, the maxi-public, will only become fully clear with a shift from theory to practice.

This shift is already beginning to take place. In 2018, civil society groups funded and organised a pilot Citizens' Assembly for Northern Ireland.[142] It was held over the course of two weekends in the autumn on the topic of social care for the elderly; a preliminary report featuring its recommendations has been submitted to Northern Ireland's Department of Health (Involve, 2018b). The reception for the initiative has been broadly positive, offering tentative answers to some basic, practical questions. Is there really an appetite for a citizens' assembly? Can people in a deeply divided place deliberate in a respectful manner? Can they navigate a complex issue to come up with concrete measures that policy-makers can be expected to implement? The answer to each appears to be 'yes'.

Of the 80 participants recruited to take part in the Citizens' Assembly via an online panel, 77 attended, closely resembling the profile of the Northern Ireland population according to age, gender, geographical residence and community background. The atmosphere was mostly serious, but consistently friendly and respectful, even during intense discussions. The members produced three high-level resolutions and 27 narrower resolutions on the future of social care for the elderly, suggesting a strong degree of engagement on a challenging topic. There were no

[142] The author was an unpaid member of the advisory group of the initiative. The citizens' assembly was organised and delivered by Involve, a leading UK public participation charity. It received funding from the Building Change Trust, the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, and Open Society Foundations.

obvious ethno-national features to the issue, but this pilot initiative broadly confirms the positive experience of citizens' assemblies previously observed in less polarised settings.

Ahead of the pilot, the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee in the House of Commons published a report on the state of democracy in Northern Ireland and pledged to follow the progress of the Citizens' Assembly:

> The Committee agrees that increasing civic participation could enhance Northern Ireland's governance in both the current impasse and the future. Citizens' Assemblies remain one option to increase civic engagement at a time where citizens are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with Northern Ireland's politics. We look forward to the publication of the pilot study to see whether it would be a suitable forum for Northern Ireland (House of Commons, 2018b: 46).

In the official response to the committee's report, the UK government officially noted the initiative, adding that it looks "forward to the outcome of the pilot study" (House of Commons, 2018c: 7). If citizens' assemblies are to be formally commissioned in decision-making in Northern Ireland, the early results of the pilot neatly complement the main results of this thesis: they can serve a valuable, democratic role.

8.2 Designing Democracy in Deeply Divided Places

Beyond the case of Northern Ireland, all deeply divided polities are challenging places to govern, regardless of how their institutions may be designed. Democratic arrangements that are intended to help manage divisions between two or more ethnic

groups may, in practice, give rise to a new set of problems. A consociational political system selects decision-makers through a proportional electoral system, gives all groups access to decision-making in an inclusive power-sharing administration, and gives groups a veto over potentially discriminatory decisions. As we see from the case of Northern Ireland, however, these carefully designed arrangements may be insufficient to establish stable governance that citizens broadly value. Taken together, the disproportionate exclusion of moderate voices from the electoral process, the emphasis on negotiation over deliberation in decision-making, and the low veto threshold, can help bring the system to a grinding halt, making it harder for the system to adequately deal with political crises – and making them more likely to begin with.

When such a crisis occurs at the elite-level, this thesis demonstrates that a consociational system may be legitimately supplemented with deliberative decision-making involving ordinary citizens. This broad finding is significant in two main respects. First, citizens' assemblies have been established around the world as a response to particular circumstances in which elected politicians are unable or unwilling to reach a contentious decision alone. These cases have been well documented (Pearse and Warren, 2008; Smith, 2009; Reuchamps and Suiter, 2016). However, their applicability to *deeply divided* contexts has been less convincingly established. In these contexts it may be assumed that political elites, not ordinary citizens, are in the best position to reach decisions that can be broadly accepted as legitimate (see Nordlinger, 1972). The present research challenges this elite-centric assumption, and shows that democratic innovations such as mini-publics could be reasonably applied to a deeply divided political setting. Given the propensity of consociational systems to encounter gridlock, potentially threatening the survival of

the system itself, this thesis provides observational and experimental evidence to justify the consideration of deliberative mini-publics as a legitimate response.

Second, beyond the capacity of mini-publics to constructively *react* to political crises in deeply divided polities, they could also serve a *pre-emptive* purpose. Consociational theory provides a powerful intellectual foundation from which democratic institutions may be designed to meet the needs of deeply divided places. However, these arrangements can be far from perfect in practice. Given the temptation to prescribe the Northern Ireland 'model' of consociational governance to other polarised environments (Wilson, 2010), future applications of consociational theory may be able to anticipate some of the potential problems associated with this kind of system and to, therefore, plan accordingly. This could be achieved by incorporating some form of supplementary citizen-based decision-making into institutional arrangements from the outset, perhaps formally outlining a role for a citizens' assembly on an ad hoc or permanent basis.

While the nature of a polity's deep divisions may help to define the realistic scope and purpose of mini-publics, these deep divisions should not be used as a pretext for avoiding the direct empowerment of ordinary citizens in decision-making. If a polity is in the midst of ethnic conflict, the immediate challenge lies in bringing an end to violence. This goal understandably places a focus on directly involving actors with the power to call and maintain a ceasefire. However, even at this particularly delicate stage conflict transformation, the broader representation of civil society should not be an afterthought. On the contrary, the formal inclusion of civil society groups can help to consolidate peace-building efforts (Kew and Wanis-St. John, 2008). While citizens' assemblies and other types of mini-public may be inappropriate vehicles for directly bringing about an end to physical conflict, their

adoption should be considered as early as possible to lay the foundations for a sustainable peace. For example, the use of mini-publics could help to democratise the process of institutional design, rather than leaving it purely up to elites to determine the principles and procedures that should shape a post-conflict political system. Assuming that a citizen-led process did produce a consociational system, though not guaranteed, such a system may enjoy greater popular endorsement from the outset by rebutting any suspicions that it was designed to serve elite interests. Thereafter, given the broadly favourable attitudes towards citizens' assemblies found in this thesis, even in a post-conflict context, the supplementation of a consociational system with mini-public decision-making could help to strengthen its performance and help prevent democratic deficits from taking hold from the outset.

8.3 The Empirical Turn of Deliberative Democracy

The results of this research have broader implications for democratic theory and practice. Achen and Bartels (2016: 301) criticise deliberative democrats for being too idealistic, "uninterested in pressing questions of *institutional design* and *legitimacy*" (emphasis added). By directly engaging with the interaction of both of these issues, this thesis provides a direct response, demonstrating the potential for deliberative mini-publics to offer perfectly realistic and effective remedies to some of the main deficiencies of contemporary representative democracies. It shows that citizens' assemblies are perceived by the maxi-public to be broadly legitimate institutional innovations, even in a deeply divided place, with a wide range of design configurations that can help promote the democratic values of political equality, deliberation and non-tyranny. These findings contribute to the "flourishing field" of

deliberative democracy (Bächtiger *et al.* 2018: 1), providing an equally inviting home for both normative and empirical scholarship, and with growing synergy between academic theory and real-world practice. From this rich base, deliberative democrats must continue to theorise, test and refine the precise conditions in which mini-publics may be utilised most effectively. Key areas for further research include broadening opportunities for participation from other citizens, the coupling of mini-publics to other institutions and processes, and the evaluation of mini-publics in a more comparative perspective. Before these three final thoughts are developed further, we first consider a methodological reflection on conducting such research.

8.3.1 Mini-Publics and Experimental Methods

To date, relatively few studies have analysed popular attitudes towards deliberative initiatives (but see Neblo *et al.* 2010; Gastil *et al.* 2016; Jäske, 2018). As with most empirical research on mini-publics, experimental studies have focused almost exclusively on the dynamics within deliberative settings (Esterling, 2018), largely leaving aside questions of their interaction with the outside world. This pattern is perhaps understandable when we consider a key obstacle to conducting macro-attitudinal research on mini-publics: many people are unlikely to know very much about these democratic innovations to begin with, let alone the subtle differences in the ways in which they may be designed. This thesis relied heavily on the use of vignettes to concisely explain some of the key features of citizens' assemblies, recognising their relative novelty, before measuring respondents' attitudes towards them. This approach was not without its challenges, and yet this in itself offers an important insight for future research.

Recall that in the first set of experiments presented in Chapters Five, Six and Seven respectively, a high proportion of participants provided incorrect responses to basic manipulation checks. Having been presented with a short vignette of a citizens' assembly, configured in a particular way, many respondents failed to recognise the key element of process design that had been manipulated in the experimental treatment to which they had been randomly assigned. This highlights the importance of including basic manipulation checks in an experiment, particularly when participants are completing the study online. More importantly, it highlights the need to design treatments that are sufficiently clear to participants in the first place (Aronow *et al.* 2016). The follow-up studies in Chapters Five, Six and Seven show how simple infographics can be deployed to strengthen the effectiveness of text-based vignettes in an experimental (or even a non-experimental) survey setting. Along with some other minor refinements, these visual accompaniments helped to ensure that the vast majority of respondents provided correct responses to the manipulation checks across all conditions.

It appears that some concepts had initially posed particular problems from the perspective of participants. For example, the idea of electing ordinary citizens to serve in a mini-public, the idea of deliberation taking place through imagined dialogue, and the idea of a citizens' assembly taking a binding decision, all seemed unfamiliar to respondents to the extent that they were less likely to successfully recognise these elements of a citizens' assembly compared to citizens' assemblies with other design features. These problems appeared to disappear after each of the experiments had been redesigned accordingly. Therefore, while researchers should not be afraid to maximise the opportunities afforded by online survey experiments, especially to investigate attitudes towards democratic innovations that have not been

widely implemented in the real world, these methods require significant effort to ensure that respondents can meaningfully engage with the stimulus material.

8.3.2 Mini-Publics and Maxi-Public Participation

A potential weakness of mini-publics is their necessary exclusion of the wider public from their membership. This is a crucial requirement for the promotion of political equality, giving all members of the population a virtually equal chance of being *included* in the formal body. However, just as mini-publics are intended to complement the existing institutions of a political system, they should not be seen as an alternative to mass participation from the maxi-public. Participation and deliberation can indeed go together (Curato *et al.* 2017). This thesis has narrowly focused on the capacity of citizens' assemblies to promote three of the democratic values specified by Fishkin (1991) – political equality, deliberation and non-tyranny – since these are most directly relevant to the way they are selected, the way they make decisions, and the way they take decisions. Taking a broader perspective, there are opportunities to explore how mini-publics can promote Fishkin's (2009: 45) fourth democratic value of mass participation, defined as "behaviour on the part of members of the mass public directed at influencing, directly or indirectly, the formulation, adoption, or implementation of governmental or policy choices."

Some of these opportunities lie in the institutional design of citizens' assemblies and other types of mini-public. For example, even before members of such a body are recruited, all citizens may be consulted on its agenda (Jacquet *et al.* 2016). Once the topic has been selected and members recruited, it is also possible for the mini-public to hold an external consultation phase, giving all citizens the

opportunity to provide an input to the internal deliberation phase (Fournier *et al.* 2011). Finally, all citizens may be involved in endorsing – or rejecting – the decision of the mini-public in a popular referendum, as has been the case following citizens' assemblies in British Columbia, Ontario and the Republic of Ireland. Arguably each of these potential forms of mass participation rely on citizens being aware of a mini-public's activities to begin with, which, in turn, depends on the media covering the initiatives with the level of attention they deserve.

8.3.3 Mini-Publics and Existing Institutions

From the perspective of elected politicians, mini-publics may be seen as an explicit challenge to their authority and the institutional territory they inhabit. This is an understandable reaction. And yet, on the contrary, mini-publics can *help* to secure the positions of elected politicians and existing institutions by strengthening citizens' perceptions of the legitimacy of the political system overall. While this thesis has explored the democratising potential of mini-publics from the perspective of the maxi-public, more research is required on the attitudes of political elites. Many high-profile initiatives appear to have emerged on the basis of good will or a fortuitous succession of events. For example, the idea for the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly was personally championed by the then Premier of the province, Gordon Campbell (Warren and Pearse, 2008). When he was asked why a citizens' assembly should be held, he simply responded, "because it's the right thing to do" (Fournier *et al.* 2011: 23). It is questionable whether such a body would have emerged without his leadership.

In Ireland, the 'We the Citizens' civil society initiative helped drive elite interest in a Constitutional Convention comprising randomly selected citizens, which itself helped pave the way for the Irish Citizens' Assembly (Farrell *et al*. 2019). Without the initial pilot, political parties may never have taken the concept seriously. Process tracing could be used to provide a systematic account of how and why mini-publics have become embedded in national decision-making in Ireland, while formal modelling could help specify the conditions under which political elites would rationally support the delegation of political authority to such bodies. Elite interviews with both serving and former political representatives could also yield valuable insights into their attitudes towards mini-public decision-making.

Furthermore, as the concept of citizens' assemblies and other forms of mini-public gains traction, scholars must also pay attention to their possible exploitation by sectional interests – and how this may adversely affect public opinion towards such bodies. In the UK, for example, while the Independent Commission on Referendums (2018) recommended that a citizens' assembly should be held before any future referendum, the inherently contested nature of holding a *second* referendum on the UK's departure from the EU could risk entangling the process with the substantive issue. In other words, by apparently ignoring the first referendum outcome (to leave the EU), the very establishment of a citizens' assembly could be interpreted as a way of engineering a different result (to remain in the EU).

If a mini-public is established to serve a particular agenda, or if it is *perceived* to serve a particular agenda, its democratic value may be significantly damaged. While there are many opportunities to strengthen democratic governance by formally coupling mini-publics to existing institutions and processes, deliberative

democrats must be vigilant of the potential for these democratic innovations to be manipulated by interest groups and political parties (Setälä and Smith, 2018). This also raises the question of the conditions in which it is desirable for mini-publics to be formally coupled to the state, or whether their democratic contribution may be more effective when they are organised by civil society (Kuyper and Wolkenstein, 2018). It would not be wise to couple mini-publics alongside existing institutions, or to even use them at all, if the contextual backdrop serves to undermine maxi-public perceptions of their legitimacy.

8.3.4 Mini-Publics in Comparative Perspective

Rather than asking only what mini-publics can do to strengthen the quality of democracy, it would also be fruitful to consider what mini-publics can do *more effectively* compared to other modes of decision-making. Research on the internal dynamics of mini-public deliberation will continue to enhance our theoretical and practical understanding of their optimal design. However, there is a growing need for such research to be matched with externally facing studies. This thesis has contributed to this effort by investigating people's evaluations of mini-publics compared to more conventional modes of decision-making. The robustness of these findings could be tested in different settings with different political contexts.

The present research has focused on the potential for one type of mini-public – citizens' assemblies' – to enhance the democratic quality of decision-making. There are, of course, many others, ranging from citizens' juries to consensus conferences. Each may make different kinds of contributions to citizens' overall evaluations of democratic performance, perhaps by meeting their expectations in

different ways and at different levels of decision-making. Cross-sectional and experimental approaches will be important in weighing up the relative advantages and disadvantages of different types of mini-public, including their capacity to deliver particular democratic principles that people expect and value.

Taking a comparative perspective also requires engagement with the dimension of time. For example, what are the durable effects of mini-public decision-making on maxi-public satisfaction with democracy? Can one-off mini-publics make a tangible difference, or do they need to be embedded as regular fixtures of a political system for them to help control a democratic deficit? A combination of cross-sectional and longitudinal approaches will help to empirically address the extent to which mini-publics can add deliberative capacity to the broader political system over time and across a range of existing institutions (see Curato and Böker, 2016). Taking a long view, if mini-publics can positively influence the deliberative capacity of other parts of the system, and serve as an effective corrective to other shortcomings of democratic performance, they "would ideally facilitate their own obsolescence" (Niemeyer and Jennstål, 2018: 330). That moment is unlikely to be soon.

The democratising value of mini-publics is significant, but their application should directly target the problems they can realistically address (Warren, 2017). These democratic innovations are not ends in themselves, but rather offer the means towards the goal of strengthening the quality of democracy from the perspective of citizens. While the democratic principles underpinning deliberative mini-publics have endured for millennia, they remain relatively novel modes of decision-making to most people, and so they deserve particular attention against a stark backdrop of democracy in crisis. This does not mean that they will always offer the best

prescription. At the same time, however, while representative democracies have suffered from chronic weaknesses for some time, the growing magnitude of these weaknesses is now testing political systems to their limits. The results of this thesis point to the encouraging possibilities of deliberative solutions. To discern their full potential and to maximise their effectiveness will require a step-change in the willingness of practitioners to consider the use of democratic innovations in decision-making, together with a renewed effort on the part of scholars to critically evaluate these processes. The views of citizens themselves should be a central focus of these endeavours.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
Cross-Sectional Survey Questionnaire (Chapters Three & Four)

Face-to-face Computer-Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI) were conducted by Ipsos-MORI in October 2015. This module of questions was embedded in an omnibus survey, covering a range of other apolitical topics. Interviewers used show cards as indicated, a standard practice in survey research to minimise the pressure on respondents to select certain responses. Respondents gave their informed consent prior to participating, in line with Ipsos-MORI procedures.

Now I am going to ask you some questions related to politics in Northern Ireland.

SHOW CARD BQ1

BQ1. On the whole how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Northern Ireland? SINGLE CODE

1	Very satisfied
2	Fairly satisfied
3	Not very satisfied
4	Not at all satisfied
8	Don't know

SHOW CARD BQ2

BQ2. Some people feel close to a particular political party while other people feel distant from it. Taking each party in turn, do you feel very close to the party, fairly close, neither close nor distant, fairly distant from the party or very distant from it? SINGLE CODE

	Very close to	Fairly close to	Neither close nor distant	Fairly distant from	Very distant from	Don't know
the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)	1	2	3	4	5	8
the SDLP	1	2	3	4	5	8
Sinn Féin	1	2	3	4	5	8
the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)	1	2	3	4	5	8
the Alliance party	1	2	3	4	5	8

SHOW CARD BQ3

BQ3. In general, how much do you trust…? SINGLE CODE

		Do not trust at all	-	-	-	Trust a lot	DK / Refused
a	political parties	1	2	3	4	5	8
b	religious leaders	1	2	3	4	5	8
c	business leaders	1	2	3	4	5	8
d	people from a Catholic/nationalist community background	1	2	3	4	5	8
e	people from a Protestant/unionist community background	1	2	3	4	5	8

SHOW CARD BQ4

BQ4. Would you say that you are…?
ASK PARTICIPANT TO READ OUT NUMBER ON SHOW CARD

1	… very strongly unionist
2	… fairly strongly unionist
3	… neither unionist nor nationalist
4	… fairly strongly nationalist
5	… very strongly nationalist
8	(Don't know)

SHOW CARD BQ5

BQ5. On some important issues – such as flag display and the issue of welfare reform – the political parties in Northern Ireland find it very hard to agree with each other, and this leads to political crises. When such a crisis happens, there may be a number of ways to try and resolve it. Please tell me to what extent you think each of the following approaches is a good idea or a bad idea.

(See overleaf for statements and response categories)

		Very good idea	Fairly good idea	Neither good nor bad	Fairly bad idea	Very bad idea	DK
a	Get the British government to come up with a solution.	1	2	3	4	5	8
b	Get the British and Irish governments working together to come up with a solution.	1	2	3	4	5	8
c	Get the British government and the Northern Ireland parties to come up with a solution.	1	2	3	4	5	8
d	Get the British and Irish governments and the Northern Ireland parties to come with a solution.	1	2	3	4	5	8
e	Get someone from outside Britain and Ireland, such as a politician or diplomat from the United States, to chair talks between the Northern Ireland parties and come up with a solution.	1	2	3	4	5	8
g	Hold a referendum on the issue so that the people can directly decide.	1	2	3	4	5	8
h	Have an immediate election to try and resolve the issue.	1	2	3	4	5	8

SHOW CARD BQ5 (AGAIN)

BQ6. Another possible way of resolving a difficult issue – such as flag display or the issue of welfare reform – would be to get a group of ordinary people to make a decision on it after they have had a chance to consider the evidence and arguments. Here's how it would work... A representative sample of 500 ordinary citizens in Northern Ireland is selected to consider the issue. These people would be selected in the same way that people are selected to serve on a jury: they are randomly selected. And they would be a cross-section of all of the people in Northern Ireland in terms of age, gender, social class and religious and community background. The people on this 'citizens' assembly' would be provided with background information about the issue and would be given a presentation of all the main arguments on both sides of the issue. They would be asked to think carefully about the evidence and the different views and would then be asked to vote on the issue. What a majority of these people decided in the vote would be seen as the decision on the issue and would be implemented. What do you think of this possible way of making decisions on difficult issues?

	Very good idea	Fairly good idea	Neither good nor bad	Fairly bad idea	Very bad idea	DK
Getting a cross section of ordinary citizens on a citizens' assembly to learn about the issue, listen to a presentation of all the main arguments and then reach a decision on the issue is a…	1	2	3	4	5	8

BQ7. If a citizens' assembly of this kind was introduced do you think it should…

1	Make the final decision
2	Make a recommendation to be considered by politicians
3	Not be given any role at all in policy-making
8	(Don't know)

SHOW CARD BQ8

BQ8. In general, how good or bad do you think ordinary people would be at making decisions if they were selected to serve on a citizens' assembly?

1	Very bad
2	Fairly bad
3	Neither good nor bad
4	Fairly good
5	Very good
8	(Don't know)

BQ9. In a citizens' assembly, do you think ordinary people would try to come to a decision that is good for everyone in Northern Ireland, or would they just try to look after the interests of their own community, or just try to look after their own personal interests?

1	… good for everyone in Northern Ireland
2	… just try to look after the interests of their own community
3	… just look after their own personal interests
8	(Don't know)

SHOW CARD BQ10

BQ10. Elections, referendums and citizens' assemblies are all possible ways of making democratic decisions, each with its own advantages and disadvantages. Taking each one in turn, to what extent are you in favour or opposed to each way of making a democratic decision?

		Strongly opposed	Opposed	Not sure	In favour	Strongly in favour	DK
a	Elections	1	2	3	4	5	8
b	Referendums	1	2	3	4	5	8
c	Citizens' assemblies	1	2	3	4	5	8

(Demographic questions are continued overleaf)

C1a. What was your age last birthday?

State exact, and code: _____

1	16-17	7	45-49
2	18-24	8	50-54
3	25-29	9	55-59
4	30-34	10	60-64
5	35-39	11	65+
6	40-44		

C1c. Gender

1	Male	2	Female

C2. How many people are there in your household aged 16+ including yourself?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9+

C3a. How many children under the age of 16 are there in your household?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7+

C1. Which of these best describes you?

1	Single
2	Married/Living as Married/Civil Partnership
3	Widowed
4	Divorced/Separated

C4. Is your home owned or rented? PROBE

1	Owned outright
2	Being bought on mortgage
3	Rented NIHE
4	Rented privately
5	Other (specify)

C7a. Which of these best describes you? MULTI CODE NOT ALLOWED

1	In paid job	Working full-time 30 hrs+/week
2		Working 8-29 hrs/week
3		Working less than 8 hrs/week
4	No paid job	Retired from full-time job
5		Unemployed
6		Housewife
9		Student at third level education college or university
10		Student at technical college or higher education institution
11		Student at secondary or grammar school
8	Other (specify)	

C13. Which member of your household would you say is the CHIEF INCOME EARNER, that is the person with the largest income, whether from employment, pensions, state benefits, investments or any other sources? *(If equal income is claimed for two people, classify the elder as the C.I.E.)*

1	Self	**Ask C15.**
2	Other	**Go to C13a.**

C13a. Name of Chief Income Earner (C.I.E.).

WRITE IN:	

C14. Is … related to you?

1	Yes
2	No; respondent is C.I.E.

C15. Does the C.I.E. have a paid job full-time or part-time? ASK ALL

1	Yes	**Ask occupational details at C17.**
2	No	**Go to C16.**

SHOW CARD C16

C16. Looking at this card, please tell me the statement that best describes the C.I.E. Just read out the letter.

1	A – Retired, gets pension from previous job	**Ask occupational details of previous job – C.17**
2	B – Unemployed, less than 2 months	
3	C – Sick, still receiving pay or statutory pay from job	
4	D – Widow, receiving pension from husband's previous job	**Ask occupational details of husband's previous job**
5	E – Divorced/separated, receiving maintenance from ex-spouse	
6	F – Full-time student	**Code Social Class C1 at C.18**
7	G – Not working, private means	**Assess Social Class at C.18**
8	H – Unemployed longer than 2 months	**Code Social Class E at C.18**
9	I – Sick - only receiving Income Support or Invalidity Benefit	
10	J – Receiving State Pension only	

C17a1. What is the C.I.E.'s job title?

WRITE IN:	

C17a2. What type of firm/organisation does/did (C.I.E.) work for?

WRITE IN:	

C17b. Does/did (C.I.E.) have any position/rank/grade in the organisation (i.e. responsible for the work of other people)?

1	Yes	**Ask C17c.**
2	No	**Go to C17e.**

C17c. What is the title of the position / rank / grade? PROMPT AS APPROPRIATE (*Foreman, Sergeant, Office Manager, Executive, Officer etc.)*

WRITE IN:	

C17c. How many people is … responsible for?

WRITE IN:	

C17e. Does … have any qualifications?

1	Yes	**Ask C17f.**
2	No	**Go to C18.**

C17f. What type of qualification is that? PROMPT AS APPROPRIATE:
Apprenticeship, professional qualifications, University degree)

WRITE IN:	

C18. Social grade:

1	A	4	C2
2	B	5	D
3	C1	6	E

SHOW CARD C19

C19. Please tell me your estimation of the household's annual income before tax. If you prefer tell me the letter beside the income band.

1	G Under £5,000	8	N £35,000-£39,999
2	H £5,000-£9,999	9	O £40,000-£49,999
3	I £10,000-£14,999	10	P £50,000+
4	J £15,000-£19,999	11	Not applicable
5	K £20,000-£24,999	12	Refused
6	L £25,000-£29,999	00	DK
7	M £30,000-£34,999		

SHOW CARD C23.

C23. From this card, what is your community background? (i.e. the community in which the respondent was predominantly brought up)

1	G – Protestant
2	T – Catholic

3	N – Other (specify)
4	E – None
5	P – Refused

SHOW CARD C27

C27b. How would you describe your national identity? MULTICODE POSSIBLE

1	British
2	Irish
3	Northern Irish
4	English
5	Scottish
6	Welsh
7	Other

SHOW CARD C7

C7. To which political party are you most likely to give your first preference vote to in a future election? SINGLE CODE ONLY

1	W – Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)	**Thank and close**
2	M – Sinn Féin	
3	T – Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)	
4	J – SDLP	
5	F – Alliance Party	
6	H – Conservative Party	
7	R – Progressive Unionist Party (PUP)	
8	E – Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV)	
9	S – Green Party	
10	B – NI21	
11	*Other (specify)*	
12	Unlikely to vote	**Go to C8**
13	Refused	
14	Undecided	

C8. Which political party are you inclined to support?

1	W – Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)
2	M – Sinn Féin
3	T – Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)
4	J – SDLP
5	F – Alliance Party
6	H – Conservative Party
7	R – Progressive Unionist Party (PUP)
8	E – Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV)
9	S – Green Party
10	B – NI21
11	*Other (specify)*
12	Unlikely to vote
13	Refused
14	Undecided

Record sample point:

Belfast City
Greater Belfast
Armagh
Antrim
Down
Tyrone/Fermanagh
Derry/Londonderry

Record area:

Urban
Rural

APPENDIX B

Descriptive Statistics for Cross-Sectional Data (Chapters Three & Four)

Variable	Obs,	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.	% Miss.
Satisfaction with democracy	877	1.94	0.83	1	4	13.6
Support for cross-party talks chaired by British government	969	3.59	1.11	1	5	6.5
Support for cross-party talks chaired by international diplomat	944	3.39	1.36	1	5	7.0
Support for election	913	2.57	1.23	1	5	10.0
Support for direct rule	939	2.95	1.34	1	5	7.5
Support for referendum	932	3.51	1.20	1	5	8.2
Support for citizens' assembly	963	3.63	1.28	1	5	5.2
Non-voter (ref: voter)	896	0.26	0.44	0	1	11.7
Ethno-national moderation	962	2.41	0.68	0	2	5.2
Distant from all political parties (ref: close to at least one)	776	0.24	0.43	0	1	23.5
Trust in political parties	919	2.01	1.07	1	5	9.5
Protestant (ref: Catholic)	895	0.52	0.50	0	1	11.8
Trust out-group (ref: do not trust out-group)	812	0.50	0.50	0	1	20.0
Age	1001	45.15	18.37	16	97	1.38
Female (ref: Male)	1015	0.52	0.50	0	1	0.0
ABC1 (ref: C2DE)	1009	0.45	0.50	0	1	0.6

Table A1: *Descriptive statistics of variables included in regression analyses in Chapters Three and Four*

Missing observations include refusals and 'don't know' responses. Three variables analysed in Chapter Four are not described in Table A1: ordinary citizens' perceived competence at making decisions, perceived motivation of decision-makers and the desired role for citizens' assemblies in taking political decisions. Descriptive statistics for these variables were presented in the substantive analysis, where the distribution of responses across their nominal categories can be better understood.

APPENDIX C
Survey Questionnaire from Decision Acceptance Experiment
(Chapter Four)

Face-to-face interviews were conducted by Ipsos-MORI in two waves (2nd-19th February and 1st-15th April 2017). This module of questions was embedded in an omnibus survey, covering a range of other apolitical topics. Respondents were randomly assigned to receive one of the six vignette-based treatments, each containing an objection precondition. Respondents gave their informed consent prior to participating, in line with Ipsos-MORI procedures.

L1. There has been discussion in recent years about whether or not to introduce special rights for people in Northern Ireland who speak Irish. Some people have called for an Irish Language Act, which would be a new law to protect the rights of Irish language speakers and to promote the use of the Irish language in Northern Ireland. Others disagree and are opposed to any special rights for Irish language speakers.

Would you support or oppose a new law of this kind?

1	**Strongly support** special rights for Irish language speakers
2	**Somewhat support** special rights for Irish language speakers
3	**Somewhat oppose** special rights for Irish language speakers
4	**Strongly oppose** special rights for Irish language speakers
8	(Don't know; unprompted); **Go to L2**

L2. If you <u>had</u> to choose, would you be slightly more inclined to <u>support</u> special rights for Irish language speakers, or slightly more inclined to <u>oppose</u> special rights for Irish language speakers?

1	**Support** special rights for Irish language speakers
2	**Oppose** special rights for Irish language speakers
8	Really don't know

Based on response to L1, the respondent will be assigned to one of two blocks corresponding with his/her stated preference:

[1] SUPPORT Irish Language Act.
[2] OPPOSE Irish Language Act.

Those responding (unprompted) **'Don't know'** to L1 and who subsequently respond **'Really don't know'** to L2 should be randomly assigned to Block [1] or [2].

Respondents within each block are then randomly assigned to one of six groups:

[A] Cross-party-talks, chaired by an international politician/diplomat
[B] Cross-party talks, chaired by the British government
[C] Direct rule
[D] Election
[E] Referendum
[F] Citizens' Assembly

Within groups [A]-[F], subjects in Block [1] will receive Treatment [1]; subjects in Block [2] will receive Treatment [2]; treatments are therefore contrary to their preferred outcome.

All respondents receive the **same basic vignette** and are then assigned to a treatment presenting them with an **unfavourable decision**.

CORE VIGNETTE:

> *Suppose that at some point in the near future the issue of Irish language rights was brought before the Northern Ireland Assembly. After debating it, a majority of MLAs supported a new law protecting Irish language rights, but it was blocked by the largest unionist party using its power of veto. This led to a worsening of relations among the political parties, creating gridlock in the Assembly and a new political crisis.*
>
> *(Treatments begin overleaf)*

GROUP [A]:
Cross-party talks, chaired by an international politician/diplomat

To try and deal with the crisis, emergency talks were held between all the main political parties. They were chaired by someone from outside Britain and Ireland, such as a politician or diplomat from the United States.

Treatment 1
After extensive negotiations, the parties reached a deal to overcome the crisis. The deal did not include any agreement on the issue of Irish language rights, and so an Irish Language Act would still not be passed in the Assembly.

Treatment 2
After extensive negotiations, the parties reached a deal to overcome the crisis. The deal included an agreement on the issue of Irish language rights, and so an Irish Language Act would now be passed in the Assembly.

A1. Would you accept this decision taken by the parties [{to introduce}/{not introduce}] an Irish Language Act, following talks chaired by an outside figure?

1	I would find this almost impossible to accept
2	I would not like it, but could live with it if I had to
3	I would happily accept the decision
8	(Don't know; unprompted)

A2. In the event of a future political crisis, would you be happy for the parties to take part in joint talks, chaired by an outside figure, to try and overcome the crisis?

1	Yes, I would be happy
2	No, I would not be happy
8	(Don't know; unprompted)

GROUP [B]:
Cross-party talks, chaired by the British government

To try and deal with the crisis, emergency talks were held between all the main political parties. They were chaired by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Treatment 1
After extensive negotiations, the parties reached a deal to overcome the crisis. The deal did not include any agreement on the issue of Irish language rights, and so an Irish Language Act would still not be passed in the Assembly.

Treatment 2
After extensive negotiations, the parties reached a deal to overcome the crisis. The deal included an agreement on the issue of Irish language rights, and so an Irish Language Act would now be passed in the Assembly.

B1. Would you accept this decision taken by the parties [{to introduce}/{not introduce}] an Irish Language Act, following talks chaired by the Secretary of State?

1	I would find this almost impossible to accept
2	I would not like it, but could live with it if I had to
3	I would happily accept the decision
8	(Don't know; unprompted)

B2. In the event of a future political crisis, would you be happy for the parties to take part in joint talks, chaired by the Secretary of State, to try and overcome the crisis?

1	Yes, I would be happy
2	No, I would not be happy
8	(Don't know; unprompted)

GROUP [C]:
Direct rule

To try and deal with the crisis, the British government intervened and introduced direct rule for a period of time.

Treatment 1
During this time, the British government decided against introducing an Irish Language Act from Westminster.

Treatment 2
During this time, the British government decided in favour of introducing an Irish Language Act from Westminster.

C1. Would you accept this decision [{to introduce}/{not introduce}] an Irish Language Act by direct rule?

1	I would find this almost impossible to accept
2	I would not like it, but could live with it if I had to
3	I would happily accept the decision
8	(Don't know; unprompted)

C2. In the event of a future political crisis, would you be happy for the British government to temporarily introduce direct rule to try and overcome it?

1	Yes, I would be happy
2	No, I would not be happy
8	(Don't know; unprompted)

GROUP [D]:
Election

To try and deal with the crisis, an immediate election was called. The issue of Irish language rights dominated the campaign.

Treatment 1
After the election, the Assembly returned to the issue. The number of MLAs elected for each party stayed about the same, and the largest unionist party again used its veto to block an Irish Language Act, meaning it did not pass.

Treatment 2
After the election, the Assembly returned to the issue. The number of MLAs elected for each party changes, and the largest unionist party could no longer use its veto to block an Irish Language Act, meaning it passed.

D1. Would you accept this decision [{to introduce}/{not introduce}] an Irish Language Act after an election focusing on the issue?

1	I would find this almost impossible to accept
2	I would not like it, but could live with it if I had to
3	I would happily accept the decision
8	(Don't know; unprompted)

D2. In the event of a future political crisis, would you be happy for an immediate election to be called to try and overcome it?

1	Yes, I would be happy
2	No, I would not be happy
8	(Don't know; unprompted)

GROUP [E]:
Referendum

To try and deal with the crisis, the parties agreed to hold an immediate referendum on the issue of Irish language rights. Voters themselves could consider both sides of the argument.

Treatment 1
In the referendum, a majority of voters supported the proposal to introduce an Irish Language Act.

Treatment 2
In the referendum, a majority of voters rejected the proposal to introduce an Irish Language Act.

E1. Would you accept this decision taken by voters in the referendum [{to introduce}/{not introduce}] an Irish Language Act?

1	I would find this almost impossible to accept
2	I would not like it, but could live with it if I had to
3	I would happily accept the decision
8	(Don't know; unprompted)

E2. In the event of a future political crisis, would you be happy for a referendum to be called to try and overcome it?

1	Yes, I would be happy
2	No, I would not be happy
8	(Don't know; unprompted)

GROUP [F]:
Citizens' assembly

To try and deal with the crisis, the parties agreed to set up a citizens' assembly of ordinary people on the issue. The several hundred members of the citizens' assembly were chosen at random, in the same way that legal juries are chosen, in order to produce a representative cross-section of the population in terms of age, gender, social class and religious and community background. They spent time receiving information on both sides of the argument and considering the evidence.

Treatment 1
The citizens' assembly considered the issue of Irish language rights and decided against introducing an Irish Language Act.

Treatment 2
The citizens' assembly considered the issue of Irish language rights and decided in favour of introducing an Irish Language Act.

F1. Would you accept this decision taken a citizens' assembly of ordinary people [{to introduce}/{not introduce}] an Irish Language Act?

1	I would find this almost impossible to accept
2	I would not like it, but could live with it if I had to
3	I would happily accept the decision
8	(Don't know; unprompted)

F2. In the event of a future political crisis, would you be happy for a citizens' assembly to try and overcome it?

1	Yes, I would be happy
2	No, I would not be happy
8	(Don't know; unprompted)

ALL RESPONDENTS RECEIVE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

P1. Would you say that you are…?
SHOW CARD

1	… very strongly unionist
2	… fairly strongly unionist
3	… neither unionist nor nationalist
4	… fairly strongly nationalist
5	… very strongly nationalist
8	Don't know

P2. In general, how much do you trust…?

		Trust a lot	-	-	-	Don't trust at all	Don't know
a	… **members of the public** in Northern Ireland?	1	2	3	4	5	8
b	… people from a **Protestant/unionist** community background?	1	2	3	4	5	8
c	… people from a **Catholic/nationalist** community background?	1	2	3	4	5	8
d	… **political parties** in Northern Ireland?	1	2	3	4	5	8
e	… the **British government**?	1	2	3	4	5	8

C1a. What was your age last birthday?

State exact, and code: _____

1	16-17	7	45-49
2	18-24	8	50-54
3	25-29	9	55-59
4	30-34	10	60-64
5	35-39	11	65+
6	40-44		

C1c. Gender

1	Male	2	Female

C2. How many people are there in your household aged 16+ including yourself?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9+

C3a. How many children under the age of 16 are there in your household?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7+

C1. Which of these best describes you?

1	Single
2	Married/Living as Married/Civil Partnership
3	Widowed
4	Divorced/Separated

C4a. Is your home owned or rented? PROBE

1	Owned outright
2	Being bought on mortgage
3	Rented NIHE
4	Rented privately
5	Other (specify)

C7a. Which of these best describes you? MULTI CODE NOT ALLOWED

1	**In paid job**	Working full-time 30 hrs+/week
2		Working 8-29 hrs/week
3		Working less than 8 hrs/week
4	**No paid job**	Retired from full-time job
5		Unemployed
6		Housewife
7		Student at third level education college or university
8		Student at technical college or higher education institution
9		Student at secondary or grammar school

10	Other (specify)

C13. Which member of your household would you say is the CHIEF INCOME EARNER, that is the person with the largest income, whether from employment, pensions, state benefits, investments or any other sources? *(If equal income is claimed for two people, classify the elder as the C.I.E.)*

1	Self	**Ask C15.**
2	Other	**Go to C13a.**

C13a. Name of Chief Income Earner (C.I.E.).

WRITE IN:	

C14. Is … related to you?

1	Yes
2	No; respondent is C.I.E.

C15. Does the C.I.E. have a paid job full-time or part-time? ASK ALL

1	Yes	**Ask occupational details at C17.**
2	No	**Go to C16.**

SHOW CARD C16

C16. Looking at this card, please tell me the statement that best describes the C.I.E. Just read out the letter.

1	A – Retired, gets pension from previous job	**Ask occupational details of previous job – C.17**
2	B – Unemployed, less than 2 months	
3	C – Sick, still receiving pay or statutory pay from job	
4	D – Widow, receiving pension from husband's previous job	**Ask occupational details of husband's previous job**
5	E – Divorced/separated, receiving maintenance from ex-spouse	
6	F – Full-time student	**Code Social Class C1 at C.18**
7	G – Not working, private means	**Assess Social Class at C.18**

8	H – Unemployed longer than 2 months	**Code Social Class E at C.18**
9	I – Sick - only receiving Income Support or Invalidity Benefit	
10	J – Receiving State Pension only	

C17a1. What is the C.I.E.'s job title?

WRITE IN:	

C17a2. What type of firm/organisation does/did (C.I.E.) work for?

WRITE IN:	

C17b. Does/did (C.I.E.) have any position/rank/grade in the organisation (i.e. responsible for the work of other people)?

1	Yes	**Ask C17c.**
2	No	**Go to C17e.**

C17c. What is the title of the position / rank / grade? PROMPT AS APPROPRIATE (*Foreman, Sergeant, Office Manager, Executive, Officer etc.)*

WRITE IN:	

C17c. How many people is … responsible for?

WRITE IN:	

C17e. Does … have any qualifications?

1	Yes	**Ask C17f.**
2	No	**Go to C18.**

C17f. What type of qualification is that? PROMPT AS APPROPRIATE: *Apprenticeship, professional qualifications, University degree)*

WRITE IN:	

C18. Social grade:

1	A	4	C2
2	B	5	D
3	C1	6	E

SHOW CARD C19

C19. Please tell me your estimation of the household's annual income before tax. If you prefer tell me the letter beside the income band.

1	G Under £5,000	8	N £35,000-£39,999
2	H £5,000-£9,999	9	O £40,000-£49,999
3	I £10,000-£14,999	10	P £50,000+
4	J £15,000-£19,999	11	Not applicable
5	K £20,000-£24,999	12	Refused
6	L £25,000-£29,999	00	DK
7	M £30,000-£34,999		

SHOW CARD C23.

C23. From this card, what is your community background? (i.e. the community in which the respondent was predominantly brought up)

1	G – Protestant
2	T – Catholic
3	N – Other (specify)
4	E – None
5	P – Refused

SHOW CARD C27

C27b. How would you describe your national identity? MULTICODE POSSIBLE

1	British
2	Irish
3	Northern Irish
4	English
5	Scottish
6	Welsh

7	Other

SHOW CARD C7

C7. Thinking about GENERAL ELECTIONS, to which political party are you most likely to give your first preference vote to in a future general election? SINGLE CODE ONLY

1	W – Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)	**Thank and close**
2	M – Sinn Féin	
3	T – Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)	
4	J – SDLP	
5	F – Alliance Party	
6	H – Conservative Party	
7	R – Progressive Unionist Party (PUP)	
8	E – Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV)	
9	S – Green Party	
10	B – NI21	
11	Q – United Kingdom Independence Party	
12	*Other (specify)*	
13	Unlikely to vote	**Go to C8**
14	Refused	
15	Undecided	

C8. Which political party are you inclined to support?

1	W – Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)
2	M – Sinn Féin
3	T – Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)
4	J – SDLP
5	F – Alliance Party
6	H – Conservative Party
7	R – Progressive Unionist Party (PUP)
8	E – Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV)
9	S – Green Party
10	B – NI21
11	Q – United Kingdom Independence Party
12	*Other (specify)*

13	Unlikely to vote
14	Refused
15	Undecided

Record sample point:

Belfast City
Greater Belfast
Armagh
Antrim
Down
Tyrone/Fermanagh
Derry/Londonderry

Record area:

Urban
Rural

APPENDIX D
Supplementary Analysis (Chapter Four)

	1	2	3
	Decision Acceptance		
(Ref: Citizens' Assembly)			
Party Talks (British Govt)	1.010 (.096)	.950 (.103)	.990 (.127)
Party Talks (Intl Diplomat)	1.261 (.196)	1.298 (.209)	1.084 (.243)
Election	.998 (.048)	.981 (.051)	.997 (.062)
Direct Rule	.962 (.063)	.929 (.068)	.920 (.083)
Referendum	**1.375** **(.055)*****	**1.417** **(.057)*****	**1.408** **(.063)*****
ILA moderation	-	**6.250** **(.138)*****	**5.907** **(.313)*****
ILA moderation x Party Talks (British Govt)	-	-	.815 (.432)
ILA moderation x Party Talks (Intl Diplomat)	-	-	2.291 (.529)
ILA moderation x Election	-	-	.841 (.434)
ILA moderation x Direct Rule	-	-	1.091 (.436)
ILA moderation x Referendum	-	-	1.164 (.741)
Constant	**2.980** **(.134)*****	**1.416** **(.149)****	**1.440** **(.170)****
N	1734	1734	1734
-2 Log Likelihood	1740.50	1533.61	1528.41
Nagelkerke R^2	.06	.22	.23
χ^2 (d.f.)	62.72 (5)***	269.60 (6)***	274.80 (11)***

Entries are odds ratios from logistic regressions; standard errors are reported in parentheses. The dependent variable is decision acceptance (accept/not accept). "ILA moderation" refers to the intensity of the respondent's preference on an Irish Language Act (1 = moderate intensity; 0 = strong intensity). Odds ratios greater than 1 indicate a positive association; odds ratios less than 1 indicate a negative association.

*$p < .10$; **$p < .05$; ***$p < .01$

Table A2: *Moderating effects of ethno-nationalism (strength of position on the Irish Language Act) on decision acceptance across different modes of decision-making*

	1	2	3
	Decision Acceptance		
(Ref: Citizens' Assembly)			
Party Talks (British Govt)	1.010 (.096)	1.030 (.101	1.218 (.197)
Party Talks (Intl Diplomat)	1.261 (.196)	1.186 (.205)	1.922 (.417)
Election	.998 (.048)	1.012 (.050)	1.140 (.096)
Direct Rule	.962 (.063)	.966 (.066)	.942 (.132)
Referendum	**1.375** **(.055)*** **	**1.410** **(.056)*** **	**1.738** **(.111)*** **
Ethno-national moderation	-	**4.077** **(.138)*** **	**6.188** **(.330)*** **
Ethno-national moderation x Party Talks (British Govt)	-	-	.638 (.462)
Ethno-national moderation x Party Talks (Intl Diplomat)	-	-	.526 (.480)
Ethno-national moderation x Election	-	-	.519 (.450)
Ethno-national moderation x Direct Rule	-	-	1.125 (.463)
Ethno-national moderation x Referendum	-	-	**.210** **(.641)** **
Constant	**2.980** **(.134)*** **	1.008 (.175)	.738 (.285)
N	1734	1708	1708
Log Likelihood	1740.50	1614.14	1603.81
Nagelkerke R^2	.06	.14	.15
χ^2 (d.f.)	62.72 (5)***	161.17 (6)***	171.50 (11)***

Entries are odds ratios from logistic regressions; standard errors are reported in parentheses. The dependent variable is decision acceptance (accept/not accept). "Ethno-national moderation" refers to the intensity of the respondent's self-identified ethno-national identity (1 = moderate unionist/nationalist, or neither; 0 = strongly unionist/nationalist). Odds ratios greater than 1 indicate a positive association; odds ratios less than 1 indicate a negative association.

*$p < .10$; **$p < .05$; ***$p < .01$

Table A3: *Moderating effects of ethno-nationalism (strength of self-identified ideology) on decision acceptance across different modes of decision-making*

APPENDIX E

Questionnaire from Online Experiments on Mini-Public Design

(Study One in Chapters Five, Six & Seven)

Participants on Opinium's online panel were recruited to complete an online survey in between 19th February and 19th March 2018. Respondents were randomly assigned to receive one of ten vignette-based treatments, constituting three distinct experiments.

INFORMED CONSENT

This study is about attitudes towards decision-making in Northern Ireland. The study has received approval from the Ethics Committee in the History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics at Queen's University Belfast.

Your participation would involve reading a short passage and answering a series of questions on your attitudes about decision-making. It should take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

You do not have to participate in this study. If you choose not to participate, you do not need to provide any reason. Your decision will have no personal or academic consequences. If you choose to participate, you may withdraw at any time during the survey.

Your responses will be confidential and anonymous.

Results from the study will be used in academic research. If you have any questions about this study, or if you would like to stay informed about these results, please contact the Principal Investigator, James Pow: jpow01@qub.ac.uk

☐ By ticking this box you are giving your consent to participating in this academic study.

B1. What is your gender?

1	Male
2	Female

B2. Please state your age.

(Drop down options appear)

B3. Which of these applies to you?

1	Working full time (30 or more hours per week)
2	Working part time (8-29 hours per week)
3	Working part time (less than 8 hours per week)
4	Full time student
5	Retired
6	Unemployed
7	Other not working

B4. Where do you currently live?
(Screening question; respondent must live in Northern Ireland to proceed)

1	North East
2	North West
3	Yorkshire & Humberside
4	East Midlands
5	West Midlands
6	East of England
7	London
8	South East
9	South West
10	Wales
11	Scotland
12	**Northern Ireland**
13	Do not live in the UK

B5. We would now like you to think about the chief income earner in your household, that is the person with the highest income. This may be you or it might be someone else.

Which of the following groups does the chief income earner in your household belong to?

(If the chief income earner is retired with an occupational pension, please enter their former occupation. Please only enter 'retired' if the chief income earner is only receiving the state pension. If the chief income earner has been unemployed for a period of less than 6 months, please answer based on their previous occupation.)

1	Higher managerial/ professional/ administrative (e.g. established doctor, solicitor, board director in large organisation (200+ employees), top level civil servant/ public service employee, head teacher etc.)
2	Intermediate managerial/ professional/ administrative (e.g. newly qualified (under 3 years) doctor, solicitor, board director of small organisation, middle manager in large organization, principal officer in civil service/ local government etc.
3	Supervisory or clerical/ junior managerial/ professional/ administrator (e.g. office worker, student doctor, foreman with 25+ employees, sales person, student teacher etc.)
4	Skilled manual worker (e.g. skilled bricklayer, carpenter, plumber, painter, bus/ ambulance driver, HGV driver, unqualified teaching assistant, pub/ bar worker etc.)
5	Semi-skilled or unskilled manual worker (e.g. manual jobs that require no special training or qualifications, apprentices to be skilled trades, caretaker, cleaner, nursery school assistant, park keeper, non-HGV driver, shop assistant etc.)
6	Student
7	Retired and living on state pension only
8	Unemployed for over 6 months or not working due to sickness

B6. Which of the following cities do you live in or nearest to? Please select one response.
(Screening question; respondents must live nearest to 'Belfast' to proceed)

1	**Belfast**	10	London
2	Birmingham	11	Manchester
3	Brighton	12	Newcastle
4	Bristol	13	Norwich
5	Cardiff	14	Nottingham
6	Edinburgh	15	Plymouth
7	Glasgow	16	Sheffield
8	Leeds	17	Southampton
9	Liverpool		

RESPONDENTS ARE **RANDOMLY ASSIGNED** TO:

➔ GROUP 1A, 1B, 1C, 1D [= EXPERIMENT 1]
➔ GROUP 2A, 2B, 2C [= EXPERIMENT 2]
➔ GROUP 3A, 3B, 3C [= EXPERIMENT 3]

GROUP [1A]:
Selection process: Citizens; sortition

Please read the following proposal.

In Northern Ireland, there are some issues on which politicians are divided over the way forward. On these issues, it has been proposed that a citizens' assembly could decide on the way forward instead.

The citizens' assembly would consist of 100 ordinary members of the public. Members would be randomly chosen in the same way that legal juries are selected.

A random sample of 100 citizens would be a cross-section of the Northern Ireland population in terms of age, gender, social class and religious and community background.

The citizens' assembly would consider the contentious issue, consider the evidence on different perspectives and different arguments, and then decide on the best way forward.

The decision would be final. In other words, the government would accept in advance the decision of the citizens' assembly and agree to implement it.

GROUP [1B]:
Selection process: Citizens + politicians; sortition

Please read the following proposal.

In Northern Ireland, there are some issues on which politicians are divided over the way forward. On these issues, it has been proposed that a version of a citizens' assembly could decide on the way forward instead.

The citizens' assembly would consist of 50 ordinary members of the public and 50 elected politicians.

The ordinary members of the public would be randomly chosen in the same way that legal juries are selected. A random sample of 50 citizens would be a cross-section of the Northern Ireland population in terms of age, gender, social class and religious and community background.

The political parties would appoint the remaining 50 members – in proportion to their seats in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The citizens' assembly would consider the contentious issue, consider the evidence on different perspectives and different arguments, and then decide on the best way forward.

The decision would be final. In other words, the government would accept in advance the decision of the citizens' assembly and agree to implement it.

GROUP [1C]:
Selection process: Citizens; election

Please read the following proposal.

In Northern Ireland, there are some issues on which politicians are divided over the way forward. On these issues, it has been proposed that a citizens' assembly could decide on the way forward instead.

The citizens' assembly would consist of 100 ordinary members of the public. Anyone would be able to put themselves forward to be a member, apart from politicians who currently hold elected office.

They would then face an election. Out of all people who put themselves forward, the 100 people with the most votes would be selected to sit on the citizens' assembly.

The citizens' assembly would consider the contentious issue, consider the evidence on different perspectives and different arguments, and then decide on the best way forward.

The decision would be final. In other words, the government would accept in advance the decision of the citizens' assembly and agree to implement it.

GROUP [1D]:
Selection process: Citizens + politicians; election

Please read the following proposal.

In Northern Ireland, there are some issues on which politicians are divided over the way forward. On these issues, it has been proposed that a version of a citizens' assembly could decide on the way forward instead.

The citizens' assembly would consist of 50 ordinary members of the public and 50 elected politicians.

Any member of the public would be able to put themselves forward to be a member. They would face an election. Out of all members of the public who put themselves forward, the 50 people with the most votes would be selected to sit on the citizens' assembly.

The political parties would appoint the remaining 50 members – in proportion to their seats in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The citizens' assembly would consider the contentious issue, consider the evidence on different perspectives and different arguments, and then decide on the best way forward.

The decision would be final. In other words, the government would accept in advance the decision of the citizens' assembly and agree to implement it.

GROUP [2A]:
Decision-making: Information + taking a decision

Please read the following proposal.

In Northern Ireland, there are some issues on which elected politicians are divided over the way forward. On these issues, it has been proposed that a citizens' assembly could decide on the way forward instead.

The citizens' assembly would consist of a group of ordinary citizens that is representative of the whole population of Northern Ireland. Members would be randomly chosen, in the same way that legal juries are selected.

The citizens' assembly would consider an issue in two phases:

1. *Receiving Information*
   Participants in the citizens' assembly will be assumed to have no prior knowledge of the issue in question. They will all be provided with background information and presented with arguments from both sides of the issue.

2. *Taking a Decision*
   After learning about the issue, members of the citizens' assembly would then be asked to vote on it. What a majority of these people decided in the vote would be seen as the decision on the issue and would be implemented.

GROUP [2B]:
Decision-making: Information + group discussion + taking a decision

Please read the following proposal.

In Northern Ireland, there are some issues on which elected politicians are divided over the way forward. On these issues, it has been proposed that a citizens' assembly could decide on the way forward instead.

The citizens' assembly would consist of a group of ordinary citizens that is representative of the whole population of Northern Ireland. Members would be randomly chosen, in the same way that legal juries are selected.

The citizens' assembly would consider an issue in three phases:

1. *Receiving Information*
   Participants in the citizens' assembly will be assumed to have no prior knowledge of the issue in question. They will all be provided with background information and presented with arguments from both sides of the issue.

2. *Group discussion*
   Participants will then talk about the issue with each other, including with members from a different community. These discussions will take place in small groups of about ten participants, facilitated by a neutral chairperson. This will allow participants the opportunity to consider other perspectives as well as their own. They will be asked to try and think about common ground on the issue.

3. *Taking a decision*
   After learning about the issue, members of the citizens' assembly would then be asked to vote on it. What a majority of these people decided in the vote would be seen as the decision on the issue and would be implemented.

GROUP [2C]:
Decision-making: Information + imagined conversation + taking a decision

Please read the following proposal.

In Northern Ireland, there are some issues on which elected politicians are divided over the way forward. On these issues, it has been proposed that a citizens' assembly could decide on the way forward instead.

The citizens' assembly would consist of a group of ordinary citizens that is representative of the whole population of Northern Ireland. Members would be randomly chosen, in the same way that legal juries are selected.

The citizens' assembly would consider an issue in three phases:

4. *Receiving Information*
   Participants in the citizens' assembly will be assumed to have no prior knowledge of the issue in question. They will all be provided with background information and presented with arguments from both sides of the issue.

5. *Imagined conversation*
   Participants will then independently spend time thinking about the issue. They will be asked to imagine that they are having a conversation with a person from another community about the issue. This will allow participants the opportunity to consider other perspectives as well as their own. They will be asked to try and think about common ground on the issue.

6. *Taking a decision*
   After learning about the issue, members of the citizens' assembly would then be asked to vote on it. What a majority of these people decided in the vote would be seen as the decision on the issue and would be implemented.

GROUP [3A]:
Decision-taking: Final decision by citizens' assembly

Please read the following proposal.

In Northern Ireland, there are some issues on which elected politicians are divided over the way forward, notably on Irish language legislation.

On the specific issue of an Irish language policy, it has been proposed that a citizens' assembly could decide on the way forward instead. The citizens' assembly would consist of a group of ordinary citizens that is representative of the whole population of Northern Ireland. Members would be randomly chosen, in the same way that legal juries are selected.

The citizens' assembly would consider the existing policy disagreement, consider the evidence on different perspectives and different arguments, and then reach a decision on Irish language policy.

The decision would be final. In other words, politicians would accept in advance the decision of the citizens' assembly and agree to implement it.

GROUP [3B]:
Decision-taking: Recommendation by citizens' assembly for politicians

Please read the following proposal.

In Northern Ireland, there are some issues on which elected politicians are divided over the way forward, notably on Irish language legislation.

On the specific issue of an Irish language policy, it has been proposed that a citizens' assembly could decide on the way forward instead. The citizens' assembly would consist of a group of ordinary citizens that is representative of the whole population of Northern Ireland. Members would be randomly chosen, in the same way that legal juries are selected.

The citizens' assembly would consider the existing policy disagreement, consider the evidence on different perspectives and different arguments, and then reach a decision on Irish language policy.

The decision would be a recommendation that would be put to the Northern Ireland Assembly. In other words, politicians would have the final say on whether or not to implement the decision of the citizens' assembly.

GROUP [3C]:
Decision-taking: Recommendation by citizens' assembly for referendum

Please read the following proposal.

In Northern Ireland, there are some issues on which elected politicians are divided over the way forward, notably on Irish language legislation.

On the specific issue of Irish language policy, it has been proposed that a citizens' assembly could decide on the way forward instead. The citizens' assembly would consist of a group of ordinary citizens that is representative of the whole population of Northern Ireland. Members would be randomly chosen, in the same way that legal juries are selected.

The citizens' assembly would consider the existing policy disagreement, consider the evidence on different perspectives and different arguments, and then reach a decision on Irish language policy.

The decision would be a recommendation that would be put to all voters in a referendum. In other words, all citizens would have the final say on whether or not to implement the decision of the citizens' assembly. Politicians would agree in advance to implement this result.

PRESENTED TO ALL RESPONDENTS:

Imagine the way in which a citizens' assembly would deal with a political issue. As a way of making a decision, to what extent do you think this process would be…

CA1. … fair or unfair?

1	Extremely fair
2	Mostly fair
3	Slightly fair
4	Neither fair nor unfair
5	Slightly unfair
6	Mostly unfair
7	Extremely unfair

CA2. … trustworthy or untrustworthy?

1	Extremely trustworthy
2	Mostly trustworthy
3	Slightly trustworthy
4	Neither trustworthy nor untrustworthy
5	Slightly untrustworthy
6	Mostly untrustworthy
7	Extremely untrustworthy

CA3. … democratic or undemocratic?

1	Extremely democratic
2	Mostly democratic
3	Slightly democratic
4	Neither democratic nor undemocratic
5	Slightly undemocratic
6	Mostly undemocratic
7	Extremely undemocratic

CA4. … efficient or inefficient?

1	Extremely efficient

2	Mostly efficient
3	Slightly efficient
4	Neither efficient nor inefficient
5	Slightly inefficient
6	Mostly inefficient
7	Extremely inefficient

CA5. … even-handed or discriminatory?

1	Extremely even-handed
2	Mostly even-handed
3	Slightly even-handed
4	Neither even-handed nor discriminatory
5	Slightly discriminatory
6	Mostly discriminatory
7	Extremely discriminatory

CA6. … acceptable or unacceptable?

1	Extremely acceptable
2	Mostly acceptable
3	Slightly acceptable
4	Neither acceptable nor unacceptable
5	Slightly unacceptable
6	Mostly unacceptable
7	Extremely unacceptable

CA7. … good or bad?

1	Extremely good
2	Mostly good
3	Slightly good
4	Neither good nor bad
5	Slightly bad
6	Mostly bad
7	Extremely bad

CA8. … competent or incompetent?

1	Extremely competent
2	Mostly competent
3	Slightly competent
4	Neither competent nor incompetent
5	Slightly incompetent
6	Mostly incompetent
7	Extremely incompetent

CA9. … supportable or unsupportable?

1	Extremely supportable
2	Mostly supportable
3	Slightly supportable
4	Neither supportable nor unsupportable
5	Slightly unsupportable
6	Mostly unsupportable
7	Extremely unsupportable

CA10. … credible or not credible?

1	Extremely credible
2	Mostly credible
3	Slightly credible
4	Neither credible nor not credible
5	Slightly not credible
6	Mostly not credible
7	Extremely not credible

PRESENTED ONLY TO RESPONDENTS IN GROUPS 1A, 1B, 1C & 1D:

PE1. Think about how people are represented in Northern Ireland's political system. How important is it to you that representation promotes political equality for everyone?

1	Very important
2	Mostly important
3	Somewhat important
4	Not very important
5	Not at all important

PRESENTED ONLY TO RESPONDENTS IN GROUPS 2A, 2B & 2C:

DL1. Think about how decisions are made in Northern Ireland's political system. How important is it to you that decisions are made after extensive deliberation (that is, after the careful consideration of evidence and arguments on both sides of an issue)?

1	Very important
2	Mostly important
3	Somewhat important
4	Not very important
5	Not at all important

PRESENTED ONLY TO RESPONDENTS IN GROUPS 3A, 3B & 3C:

DE1. Think about how decisions are taken in Northern Ireland's political system. How important is it to you that decisions do not discriminate against a particular group?

1	Very important
2	Mostly important
3	Somewhat important
4	Not very important
5	Not at all important

PRESENTED TO ALL RESPONDENTS:

Now think about the Northern Ireland Assembly at Stormont.

When it comes to the way in which the Northern Ireland Assembly makes decisions, to what extent do you think its decision-making process is…

NIA1. … fair or unfair?

1	Extremely fair
2	Mostly fair
3	Slightly fair
4	Neither fair nor unfair
5	Slightly unfair
6	Mostly unfair
7	Extremely unfair

NIA2. … trustworthy or untrustworthy?

1	Extremely trustworthy
2	Mostly trustworthy
3	Slightly trustworthy
4	Neither trustworthy nor untrustworthy
5	Slightly untrustworthy
6	Mostly untrustworthy
7	Extremely untrustworthy

NIA3. … democratic or undemocratic?

1	Extremely democratic
2	Mostly democratic
3	Slightly democratic
4	Neither democratic nor undemocratic
5	Slightly undemocratic
6	Mostly undemocratic
7	Extremely undemocratic

NIA4. … efficient or inefficient?

1	Extremely efficient
2	Mostly efficient
3	Slightly efficient
4	Neither efficient nor inefficient
5	Slightly inefficient
6	Mostly inefficient
7	Extremely inefficient

NIA5. … even-handed or discriminatory?

1	Extremely even-handed
2	Mostly even-handed
3	Slightly even-handed
4	Neither even-handed nor discriminatory
5	Slightly discriminatory
6	Mostly discriminatory
7	Extremely discriminatory

NIA6. … acceptable or unacceptable?

1	Extremely acceptable
2	Mostly acceptable
3	Slightly acceptable
4	Neither acceptable nor unacceptable
5	Slightly unacceptable
6	Mostly unacceptable
7	Extremely unacceptable

NIA7. … good or bad?

1	Extremely good
2	Mostly good
3	Slightly good
4	Neither good nor bad
5	Slightly bad
6	Mostly bad

7	Extremely bad

NIA8. … competent or incompetent?

1	Extremely competent
2	Mostly competent
3	Slightly competent
4	Neither competent nor incompetent
5	Slightly incompetent
6	Mostly incompetent
7	Extremely incompetent

NIA9. … supportable or unsupportable?

1	Extremely supportable
2	Mostly supportable
3	Slightly supportable
4	Neither supportable nor unsupportable
5	Slightly unsupportable
6	Mostly unsupportable
7	Extremely unsupportable

NIA10. … credible or not credible?

1	Extremely credible
2	Mostly credible
3	Slightly credible
4	Neither credible nor not credible
5	Slightly not credible
6	Mostly not credible
7	Extremely not credible

PA1. If there were an election for the Northern Ireland Assembly tomorrow, which political party would you vote for?

1	Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)
2	Sinn Féin
3	Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)
4	Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP)
5	Alliance
6	Other (specify)
7	Would not vote
8	Don't know

PA2. Would you say that you are…

1	… very strongly unionist?
2	… fairly strongly unionist?
3	… neither unionist nor nationalist?
4	… fairly strongly nationalist?
5	… very strongly nationalist?
8	Don't know

PA3. What is your community background?

1	Catholic
2	Protestant
3	Other religion
4	No religion
5	Prefer not to say

PA4. In general, how much do you trust…?

		Trust a lot	-	-	-	Don't trust at all	Don't know
a	… **members of the public** in Northern Ireland?	1	2	3	4	5	8
b	… people from a **Protestant/unionist** community background?	1	2	3	4	5	8

c	… people from a **Catholic/nationalist** community background?	1	2	3	4	5	8
d	… **political parties** in Northern Ireland?	1	2	3	4	5	8
e	… the **British government**?	1	2	3	4	5	8

APPENDIX F
Supplementary Analysis (Chapter Five)

Tables A4 and A5 present factor analysis for each of the ten-item legitimacy scales used in Studies One and Two of Chapter Five.

	Factor 1	**Factor 1**
	Citizens' Assembly Scale	*Northern Ireland Assembly Scale*
Fair/unfair	.864	.797
Trustworthy/untrustworthy	.920	.833
Democratic/undemocratic	.859	.792
Efficient/inefficient	.797	.775
Even-handed/discriminatory	.881	.812
Acceptable/unacceptable	.947	.854
Good/bad	.940	.906
Competent/incompetent	.908	.844
Supportable/unsupportable	.942	.873
Credible/not credible	.939	.868

Table A4: *Factor matrix for citizens' assembly legitimacy scale and Northern Ireland Assembly legitimacy scale (Study One)*

Factor loadings are unrotated: since only one factor was extracted for each scale, the solutions could not be rotated. All items had a loading greater than .5, and so all items were retained in each scale. Cronbach's α = .974 (citizens' assembly ten-item scale); .951 (Northern Ireland Assembly ten-item scale).

	Factor 1	**Factor 1**
	Citizens' Assembly Scale	*Northern Ireland Assembly Scale*
Fair/unfair	.909	.567
Trustworthy/untrustworthy	.921	.837
Democratic/undemocratic	.864	.807
Efficient/inefficient	.876	.757
Even-handed/discriminatory	.903	.765
Acceptable/unacceptable	.940	.897
Good/bad	.945	.917
Competent/incompetent	.913	.874
Supportable/unsupportable	.939	.915
Credible/not credible	.944	.918

Table A5: *Factor matrix for citizens' assembly legitimacy scale and Northern Ireland Assembly legitimacy scale (Study Two)*

Factor loadings are unrotated: since only one factor was extracted for each scale, the solutions could not be rotated. All items had a loading greater than .5, and so all items were retained in each scale. Cronbach's α = .978 (citizens' assembly ten-item scale); .949 (Northern Ireland Assembly ten-item scale).

*Tables A6 and A7 present alternative analyses for the experiment in **Study One** of Chapter Five. Table A6 presents ANOVA with all respondents; Table A7 presents ANOVA for only those respondents who passed the manipulation checks. Dropping respondents who failed the manipulation checks does not alter the substantive results.*

	Sum of Squares	**d.f.**	**Mean Square**	***F***	**Sig.**
Regression	16.496	3	5.499	1.922	.126
Residual	938.313	328	2.861		
Total	954.810	331			

Table A6: *ANOVA for Study One experiment (all respondents)*

	Sum of Squares	**d.f.**	**Mean Square**	***F***	**Sig.**
Regression	27.665	3	9.222	3.707	0.13
Residual	333.361	134	2.488		
Total	361.026	137			

Table A7: *ANOVA for Study One experiment (excluding respondents who failed manipulation checks)*

*Tables A8 and A9 present alternative analyses for the experiment in **Study Two** of Chapter Five. Table A8 presents ANOVA with all respondents; Table A9 presents ANOVA for only those respondents who passed the manipulation checks. Dropping respondents who failed the manipulation checks does not alter the substantive results.*

	Sum of Squares	**d.f.**	**Mean Square**	***F***	**Sig.**
Regression	4.695	3	1.565	.560	.642
Residual	906.190	324	2.797		
Total	910.885	327			

Table A8: *ANOVA for Study Two experiment (all respondents)*

	Sum of Squares	**d.f.**	**Mean Square**	***F***	**Sig.**
Regression	8.743	3	2.914	1.047	.372
Residual	773.466	278	2.782		
Total	782.209	281			

Table A9: *ANOVA for Study Two experiment (excluding respondents who failed manipulation checks)*

Tables A10 to A12 present multiple regression analyses to test for moderating effects on the relationship between the mode of selection of a citizens' assembly and its perceived legitimacy.

	1	2	3
	Perceived Legitimacy of Citizens' Assembly		
(Ref: Citizens only; sortition)			
Mixed members; sortition	.208 (.288)	.009 (.281)	**4.387** **(1.736)****
Citizens only; election	-.209 (.278)	-.306 (.270)	1.254 (1.262)
Mixed members; election	-.255 (.264)	-.371 (.255)	**2.044** **(1.220)***
Political equality	-	**.519** **(.108)*****	**.839** **(.166)*****
Political equality x Mixed members; sortition	-	-	**-.964** **(.373)****
Political equality x Citizens only; election	-	-	-.362 (.279)
Political equality x Mixed members; election	-	-	**-.552** **(.270)****
Constant	**3.464** **(.185)*****	**1.240*** **(.497)**	-.132 (.731)
N	281	280	280
Adjusted R^2	.00	.07	.09

Entries are OLS regression coefficients; standard errors are reported in parentheses. The dependent variable is the perceived legitimacy of each model of citizens' assembly (mean of ten-item scale). The perceived importance of political equality is measured on a five-point scale (1= not at all important; 5 = extremely important).

*$p < .10$; **$p < .05$; ***$p < .01$

Table A10: *The moderating effect of perceived importance of political equality on the perceived legitimacy of each model of citizens' assembly*

	1	2	3
	Perceived Legitimacy of Citizens' Assembly		
(Ref: Citizens only; sortition)			
Mixed members; sortition	.208 (.288)	.227 (.285)	**.814** **(.431)***
Citizens only; election	-.209 (.278)	-.280 (.272)	-.043 (.431)
Mixed members; election	-.255 (.264)	-.318 (.259)	-.328 (.416)
Ethno-national moderation	-	**.425***** **(.118)**	**.607** **(.225)*****
Ethno-national moderation x Mixed members; sortition	-	-	**-.649** **(.349)***
Ethno-national moderation x Citizens only; election	-	-	-.230 (.323)
Ethno-national moderation x Mixed members; election	-	-	.010 (.318)
Constant	**3.464** **(.185)*****	**3.091** **(.219)**	**2.904** **(.294)*****
N	281	278	278
Adjusted R^2	.00	.04	.05

Entries are OLS regression coefficients; standard errors are reported in parentheses. The dependent variable is the perceived legitimacy of each model of citizens' assembly (mean of ten-item scale). Ethno-national moderation is measured on a three-point scale (1 = very strongly unionist/nationalist; 1 = fairly strongly unionist/nationalist; 2 = neither unionist/nationalist).

*$p < .10$; **$p < .05$; ***$p < .01$

Table A11: *The moderating effect of ethno-national ideology on the perceived legitimacy of each model of citizens' assembly*

	1	2	3
	Perceived Legitimacy of Citizens' Assembly		
(Ref: Citizens only; sortition)			
Mixed members; sortition	.208 (.288)	-.002 (.341)	-.023 (.490)
Citizens only; election	-.209 (.278)	-.243 (.329)	.042 (.403)
Mixed members; election	-.255 (.264)	-.279 (.306)	.109 (.395)
Catholic (ref: Protestant)	-	**.816** **(.241)*** **	**1.425** **(.479)*** **
Catholic x Mixed members; sortition	-	-	-.337 (.712)
Catholic x Citizens only; election	-	-	-.938 (.703)
Catholic x Mixed members; election	-	-	-1.045 (.641)
Constant	**3.464** **(.185)*** **	**2.161** **(.219)*** **	**2.004** **(.243)*** **
N	281	221	221
Adjusted R^2	.00	.04	.04

Entries are OLS regression coefficients; standard errors are reported in parentheses. The dependent variable is the perceived legitimacy of each model of citizens' assembly (mean of ten-item scale). Community background is operationalised as a dummy variable (1 = Catholic; 0 = Protestant).

*$p < .10$; **$p < .05$; ***$p < .01$

Table A12: *The moderating effect of community background on the perceived legitimacy of each model of citizens' assembly*

APPENDIX G
Supplementary Analysis (Chapter Six)

Tables A13 and A14 present factor analysis for each of the ten-item legitimacy scales used in Studies One and Two of Chapter Six.

	Factor 1	**Factor 1**
	Citizens' Assembly Scale	*Northern Ireland Assembly Scale*
Fair/unfair	.849	.783
Trustworthy/untrustworthy	.885	.847
Democratic/undemocratic	.865	.809
Efficient/inefficient	.805	.679
Even-handed/discriminatory	.838	.814
Acceptable/unacceptable	.937	.906
Good/bad	.943	.912
Competent/incompetent	.889	.852
Supportable/unsupportable	.942	.921
Credible/not credible	.936	.888

Table A13: *Factor matrix for citizens' assembly legitimacy scale and Northern Ireland Assembly legitimacy scale (Study One)*

Factor loadings are unrotated: since only one factor was extracted for each scale, the solutions could not be rotated. All items had a loading greater than .5, and so all items were retained in each scale. Cronbach's α = .970 (citizens' assembly ten-item scale); .954 (Northern Ireland Assembly ten-item scale).

	Factor 1	**Factor 1**
	Citizens' Assembly Scale	*Northern Ireland Assembly Scale*
Fair/unfair	.887	.439
Trustworthy/untrustworthy	.906	.808
Democratic/undemocratic	.851	.799
Efficient/inefficient	.836	.760
Even-handed/discriminatory	.876	.719
Acceptable/unacceptable	.939	.884
Good/bad	.944	.906
Competent/incompetent	.896	.869
Supportable/unsupportable	.938	.894
Credible/not credible	.937	.882

Table A14: *Factor matrix for citizens' assembly legitimacy scale and Northern Ireland Assembly legitimacy scale (Study Two)*

Factor loadings are unrotated: since only one factor was extracted for each scale, the solutions could not be rotated. All items had a loading greater than .5 apart from the fairness item on the Northern Ireland Assembly scale. However, all ten items are included in the final sets of scales since its factor loading is reasonably borderline (.44) and since the fairness item has loaded highly on identical multi-item legitimacy scales. In other words, this lower factor loading for the fairness item appears to be anomalous. Cronbach's α = .974 (citizens' assembly ten-item scale); .939 (Northern Ireland Assembly ten-item scale).

*Tables A15 and A16 present alternative analyses for the experiment in **Study One** of Chapter Six. Table A15 presents ANOVA with all respondents; Table A16 presents ANOVA for only those respondents who passed the manipulation checks. Dropping respondents who failed the manipulation checks does not alter the substantive results.*

	Sum of Squares	**d.f.**	**Mean Square**	***F***	**Sig.**
Regression	2.780	2	1.390	.567	.568
Residual	642.940	262	2.454		
Total	645.720	264			

Table A15: *ANOVA for Study One experiment (all respondents)*

	Sum of Squares	**d.f.**	**Mean Square**	***F***	**Sig.**
Regression	.967	2	.484	.197	.821
Residual	291.734	119	2.452		
Total	292.702	121			

Table A16: *ANOVA for Study One experiment (excluding respondents who failed manipulation checks)*

*Tables A17 and A18 present alternative analyses for the experiment in **Study Two** of Chapter Six. Table A17 presents ANOVA with all respondents; Table A18 presents ANOVA for only those respondents who passed the manipulation checks. Dropping respondents who failed the manipulation checks does not alter the substantive results.*

	Sum of Squares	**d.f.**	**Mean Square**	***F***	**Sig.**
Regression	3.478	2	1.739	.640	.528
Residual	731.550	269	2.720		
Total	735.029	271			

Table A17: *ANOVA for Study Two experiment (all respondents)*

	Sum of Squares	**d.f.**	**Mean Square**	***F***	**Sig.**
Regression	3.252	2	1.626	.594	.553
Residual	692.230	253	2.736		
Total	695.482	255			

Table A18: *ANOVA for Study Two experiment (excluding respondents who failed manipulation checks)*

Tables A19 to A21 present multiple regression analyses to test for moderating effects on the relationship between the mode of selection of a citizens' assembly and its perceived legitimacy.

	1	2	3
	Perceived Legitimacy of Citizens' Assembly		
(Ref: External deliberation)			
Information only	.232 (.253)	.146 (.252)	**4.786** **(1.561)*****
Internal deliberation	.257 (.260)	.192 (.258)	1.879 (1.491)
Deliberation	-	**.378** **(.138)*****	**.785** **(.216)*****
Deliberation x Information only	-	-	**-1.007** **(.334)*****
Deliberation x Internal deliberation	-	-	-.378 (.324)
Constant	**3.200** **(.187)*****	**1.508** **(.645)****	-.310 (.983)
N	255	254	254
Adjusted R^2	-.00	.02	.05

Entries are OLS regression coefficients; standard errors are reported in parentheses. The dependent variable is the perceived legitimacy of each model of citizens' assembly (mean of ten-item scale). The perceived importance of deliberation is measured on a five-point scale (1= not at all important; 5 = extremely important).

*$p < .10$; **$p < .05$; ***$p < .01$

Table A19: *The moderating effect of perceived importance of deliberation on the perceived legitimacy of each model of citizens' assembly*

	1	2	3
	Perceived Legitimacy of Citizens' Assembly		
(Ref: External deliberation)			
Information only	.232 (.253)	.241 (.249)	**.839** **(.384)****
Internal deliberation	.257 (.260)	.174 (.258)	.296 (.428)
Ethno-national moderation	-	**.448** **(.127)*****	**.721** **(.225)*****
Ethno-national moderation x Information only	-	-	**-.638** **(.308)****
Ethno-national moderation x Internal deliberation	-	-	-.141 (.314)
Constant	**3.200** **(.187)*****	**2.775** **(.224)*****	**2.498** **(.292)*****
N	255	250	250
Adjusted R^2	-.00	.04	.05

Entries are OLS regression coefficients; standard errors are reported in parentheses. The dependent variable is the perceived legitimacy of each model of citizens' assembly (mean of ten-item scale). Ethno-national moderation is measured on a three-point scale (1 = very strongly unionist/nationalist; 1 = fairly strongly unionist/nationalist; 2 = neither unionist/nationalist).

*$p < .10$; **$p < .05$; ***$p < .01$

Table A20: *The moderating effect of ethno-national ideology on the perceived legitimacy of each model of citizens' assembly*

	1	2	3
	Perceived Legitimacy of Citizens' Assembly		
(Ref: External deliberation)			
Information only	.232 (.253)	.401 (.287)	.587 (.379)
Internal deliberation	.257 (.260)	.279 (.291)	.925 (.376)
Catholic (ref: Protestant)	-	**.633** **(.213)*** **	**1.400** **(.440)*** **
Catholic x Information only	-	-	-.608 (.575)
Catholic x Internal deliberation	-	-	**-1.534** **(.586)*** **
Constant	**3.200** **(.187)*** **	**2.720** **(.229)*** **	**2.447** **(.262)*** **
N	255	205	205
Adjusted R^2	-.00	.04	.06

Entries are OLS regression coefficients; standard errors are reported in parentheses. The dependent variable is the perceived legitimacy of each model of citizens' assembly (mean of ten-item scale). Community background is operationalised as a dummy variable (1 = Catholic; 0 = Protestant).

*$p < .10$; **$p < .05$; ***$p < .01$

Table A21: *The moderating effect of community background on the perceived legitimacy of each model of citizens' assembly*

S

APPENDIX H
Supplementary Analysis (Chapter Seven)

Tables A22 and A23 present factor analysis for each of the ten-item legitimacy scales used in Studies One and Two of Chapter Seven.

	Factor 1	**Factor 1**
	Citizens' Assembly Scale	*Northern Ireland Assembly Scale*
Fair/unfair	.872	.811
Trustworthy/untrustworthy	.908	.852
Democratic/undemocratic	.853	.860
Efficient/inefficient	.735	.757
Even-handed/discriminatory	.868	.824
Acceptable/unacceptable	.937	.879
Good/bad	.951	.887
Competent/incompetent	.896	.855
Supportable/unsupportable	.948	.866
Credible/not credible	.941	.873

Table A22: *Factor matrix for citizens' assembly legitimacy scale and Northern Ireland Assembly legitimacy scale (Study One)*

Factor loadings are unrotated: since only one factor was extracted for each scale, the solutions could not be rotated. All items had a loading greater than .5, and so all items were retained in each scale. Cronbach's $\alpha = .971$ (citizens' assembly ten-item scale); .956 (Northern Ireland Assembly ten-item scale).

	Factor 1	**Factor 1**
	Citizens' Assembly Scale	*Northern Ireland Assembly Scale*
Fair/unfair	.910	.406
Trustworthy/untrustworthy	.915	.834
Democratic/undemocratic	.898	.852
Efficient/inefficient	.783	.776
Even-handed/discriminatory	.912	.676
Acceptable/unacceptable	.941	.890
Good/bad	.947	.905
Competent/incompetent	.896	.875
Supportable/unsupportable	.937	.917
Credible/not credible	.949	.892

Table A23: *Factor matrix for citizens' assembly legitimacy scale and Northern Ireland Assembly legitimacy scale (Study Two)*

Factor loadings are unrotated: since only one factor was extracted for each scale, the solutions could not be rotated. All items had a loading greater than .5 apart from the fairness item on the Northern Ireland Assembly scale. However, all ten items are included in the final sets of scales since its factor loading is reasonably borderline (.41) and since the fairness item has loaded highly on identical multi-item legitimacy scales. In other words, this lower factor loading for the fairness item appears to be anomalous. Cronbach's α = .976 (citizens' assembly ten-item scale); .943 (Northern Ireland Assembly ten-item scale).

*Tables A24 and A25 present alternative analyses for the experiment in **Study One** of Chapter Seven. Table A24 presents ANOVA with all respondents; Table A25 presents ANOVA for only those respondents who passed the manipulation checks. Dropping respondents who failed the manipulation checks does not alter the substantive results.*

	Sum of Squares	**d.f.**	**Mean Square**	***F***	**Sig.**
Regression	7.083	2	3.541	1.318	.270
Residual	674.579	251	2.688		
Total	681.662	253			

Table A24: *ANOVA for Study One experiment (all respondents)*

	Sum of Squares	**d.f.**	**Mean Square**	***F***	**Sig.**
Regression	11.021	2	5.511	2.032	.134
Residual	428.501	158	2.712		
Total	439.522	160			

Table A25: *ANOVA for Study One experiment (excluding respondents who failed manipulation checks)*

*Tables A26 and A27 present alternative analyses for the experiment in **Study Two** of Chapter Seven. Table A26 presents ANOVA with all respondents; Table A27 presents ANOVA for only those respondents who passed the manipulation checks. Dropping respondents who failed the manipulation checks does not alter the substantive results.*

	Sum of Squares	**d.f.**	**Mean Square**	***F***	**Sig.**
Regression	13.100	2	6.550	2.222	.110
Residual	848.919	288	2.948		
Total	862.019	290			

Table A26: *ANOVA for Study Two experiment (all respondents)*

	Sum of Squares	**d.f.**	**Mean Square**	***F***	**Sig.**
Regression	11.751	2	5.875	1.995	.138
Residual	771.551	262	2.945		
Total	783.302	264			

Table A27: *ANOVA for Study Two experiment (excluding respondents who failed manipulation checks)*

Tables A28 to A30 present multiple regression analyses to test for moderating effects on the relationship between the mode of selection of a citizens' assembly and its perceived legitimacy.

	1	2	3
	Perceived Legitimacy of Citizens' Assembly		
(Ref: Referendum recommendation)			
Binding decision	-.348 (.253)	-.411 (.251)	-1.402 (1.442)
NI Assembly recommendation	**-.513** **(.264)***	**-.585** **(.262)****	2.310 (1.514)
Non-tyranny	-	**.353** **(.131)*****	**.446** **(.188)****
Non-tyranny x Binding decision	-	-	.209 (.309)
Non-tyranny x NI Assembly recommendation	-	-	**-.621** **(.323)***
Constant	**3.689** **(.183)*****	**2.105** **(.613)*****	**1.686** **(.864)***
N	264	264	264
Adjusted R^2	.01	.03	.05

Entries are OLS regression coefficients; standard errors are reported in parentheses. The dependent variable is the perceived legitimacy of each model of citizens' assembly (mean of ten-item scale). The perceived importance of non-tyranny is measured on a five-point scale (1= not at all important; 5 = extremely important).

*$p < .10$; **$p < .05$; ***$p < .01$

Table A28: *The moderating effect of perceived importance of non-tyranny on the perceived legitimacy of each model of citizens' assembly*

	1	2	3
	Perceived Legitimacy of Citizens' Assembly		
(Ref: Referendum recommendation)			
Binding decision	-.348 (.253)	**-.498** **(.244)****	-.244 (.400)
NI Assembly recommendation	**-.513** **(.264)***	**-.522** **(.254)****	-.312 (.391)
Ethno-national moderation	-	**.611** **(.124)*****	**.761** **(.208)*****
Ethno-national moderation x Binding decision	-	-	-.247 (.299)
Ethno-national moderation x NI Assembly recommendation	-	-	-.219 (.306)
Constant	**3.689** **(.183)*****	**3.112** **(.211)*****	**2.971** **(.263)*****
N	264	262	262
Adjusted R^2	.01	.09	.08

Entries are OLS regression coefficients; standard errors are reported in parentheses. The dependent variable is the perceived legitimacy of each model of citizens' assembly (mean of ten-item scale). Ethno-national moderation is measured on a three-point scale (1 = very strongly unionist/nationalist; 1 = fairly strongly unionist/nationalist; 2 = neither unionist/nationalist).

*$p < .10$; **$p < .05$; ***$p < .01$

Table A29: *The moderating effect of ethno-national ideology on the perceived legitimacy of each model of citizens' assembly*

	1	2	3
	Perceived Legitimacy of Citizens' Assembly		
(Ref: Referendum recommendation)			
Binding decision	-.348 (.253)	-.201 (.300)	-.206 (.489)
NI Assembly recommendation	**-.513** **(.264)***	-.365 (.305)	-.397 (.441)
Catholic (ref: Protestant)	-	.021 (.253)	-.004 (.427)
Catholic x Binding decision	-	-	.012 (.622)
Catholic x NI Assembly recommendation	-	-	0.64 (.614)
Constant	**3.689** **(.183)*****	**3.493** **(.253)*****	**3.506** **(.317)*****
N	264	208	208
Adjusted R^2	.01	-.01	-.02

Entries are OLS regression coefficients; standard errors are reported in parentheses. The dependent variable is the perceived legitimacy of each model of citizens' assembly (mean of ten-item scale). Community background is operationalised as a dummy variable (1 = Catholic; 0 = Protestant).

*$p < .10$; **$p < .05$; ***$p < .01$

Table A30: *The moderating effect of community background on the perceived legitimacy of each model of citizens' assembly*

APPENDIX I

Questionnaire from Online Experiments on Mini-Public Design

(Study Two in Chapters Five, Six & Seven)

Participants on LucidTalk's online panel were recruited to complete an online survey between 3rd and 5th June 2018. Respondents were randomly assigned to receive one of ten vignette-based treatments, constituting three distinct experiments.

INFORMED CONSENT

This study is about attitudes towards decision-making in Northern Ireland. The study has received approval from the Ethics Committee in the History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics at Queen's University Belfast.

Your participation would involve reading a short passage and answering a series of questions on your attitudes about decision-making. It should take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

You do not have to participate in this study. If you choose not to participate, you do not need to provide any reason. Your decision will have no personal or academic consequences. If you choose to participate, you may withdraw at any time during the survey.

Your responses will be confidential and anonymous.

Results from the study will be used in academic research. If you have any questions about this study, or if you would like to stay informed about these results, please contact the Principal Investigator, James Pow: jpow01@qub.ac.uk

☐ By ticking this box you are giving your consent to participating in this academic study.

B1. What is your gender?

1	Male
2	Female

B2. Please select your age group.

1	18-24 years	3	45-64 years
2	25-44 years	4	65+ years

B3. Which of these applies to you?

1	Working full time (30 or more hours per week)
2	Working part time (8-29 hours per week)
3	Working part time (less than 8 hours per week)
4	Full time student
5	Retired
6	Unemployed
7	Other not working

B4. We would now like you to think about the chief income earner in your household, that is the person with the highest income. This may be you or it might be someone else.

Which of the following groups does the chief income earner in your household belong to?

(If the chief income earner is retired with an occupational pension, please enter their former occupation. Please only enter 'retired' if the chief income earner is only receiving the state pension. If the chief income earner has been unemployed for a period of less than 6 months, please answer based on their previous occupation.)

1	Senior or middle manager/company director/doctor/lawyer etc.
2	Junior manager/small business owner/skilled trade/engineer/teacher/farmer etc.
3	Clerk/tradesman/driver/labourer etc.
4	Unemployed/on benefits/temporarily not working etc.
5	Retired/housewife/househusband
6	Student/full-time education/training

RESPONDENTS ARE **RANDOMLY ASSIGNED** TO:

➔ GROUP 1A, 1B, 1C, 1D [= EXPERIMENT 1]
➔ GROUP 2A, 2B, 2C [= EXPERIMENT 2]
➔ GROUP 3A, 3B, 3C [= EXPERIMENT 3]

GROUP [1A]:
Selection process: Citizens; sortition

Please read the following proposal.

In Northern Ireland, there are some issues on which politicians are divided over the way forward. On these issues, it has been proposed that a citizens' assembly could decide on the way forward instead.

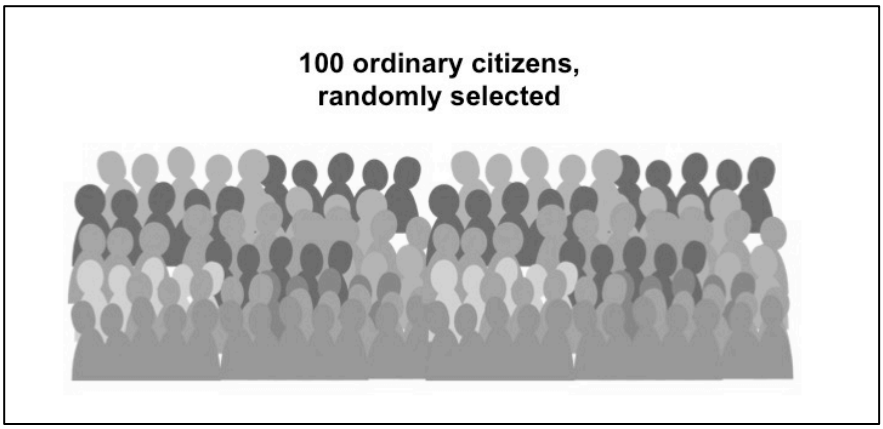
The citizens' assembly would consist of 100 ordinary members of the public. Members would be randomly chosen in the same way that legal juries are selected.

A random sample of 100 citizens would be a cross-section of the Northern Ireland population in terms of age, gender, social class and religious and community background.

The citizens' assembly would consider the contentious issue, consider the evidence on different perspectives and different arguments, and then decide on the best way forward.

The decision would be final. In other words, the government would accept in advance the decision of the citizens' assembly and agree to implement it.

The graphic below summarises the membership of the citizens' assembly:



GROUP [1B]:
Selection process: Citizens + politicians; sortition

Please read the following proposal.

In Northern Ireland, there are some issues on which politicians are divided over the way forward. On these issues, it has been proposed that a version of a citizens' assembly could decide on the way forward instead.

The citizens' assembly would consist of 50 ordinary members of the public and 50 elected politicians.

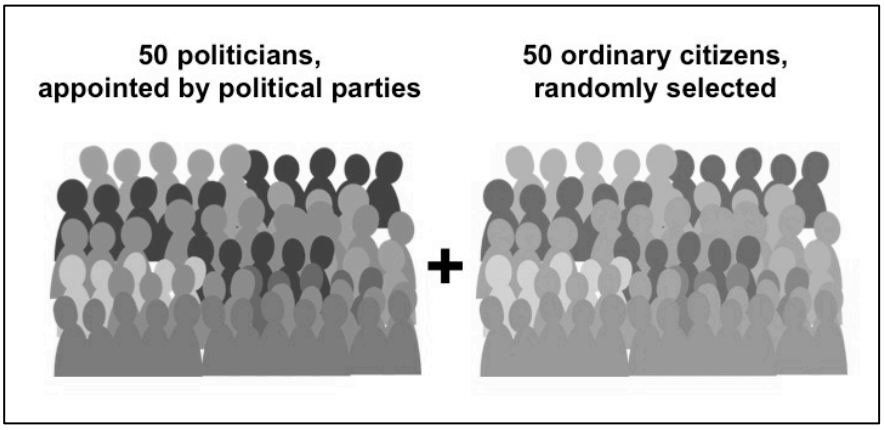
The ordinary members of the public would be randomly chosen in the same way that legal juries are selected. A random sample of 50 citizens would be a cross-section of the Northern Ireland population in terms of age, gender, social class and religious and community background.

The political parties would appoint the remaining 50 members – in proportion to their seats in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The citizens' assembly would consider the contentious issue, consider the evidence on different perspectives and different arguments, and then decide on the best way forward.

The decision would be final. In other words, the government would accept in advance the decision of the citizens' assembly and agree to implement it.

The graphic below summarises the membership of the citizens' assembly:



GROUP [1C]:
Selection process: Citizens; election

Please read the following proposal.

In Northern Ireland, there are some issues on which politicians are divided over the way forward. On these issues, it has been proposed that a citizens' assembly could decide on the way forward instead.

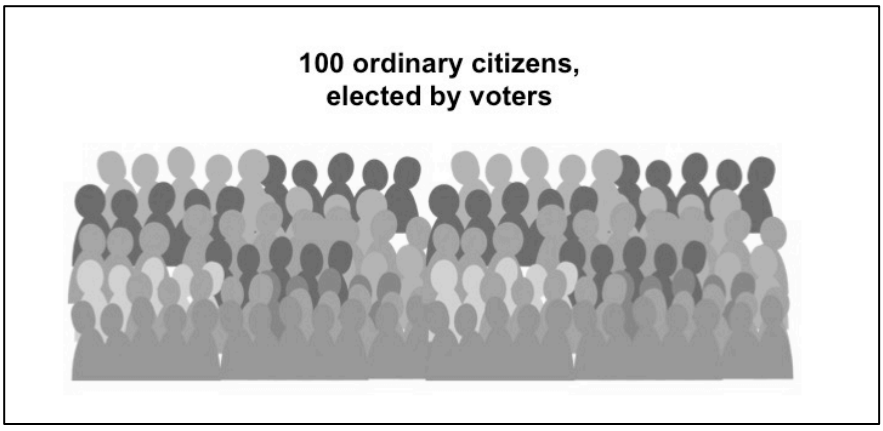
The citizens' assembly would consist of 100 ordinary members of the public. Anyone would be able to put themselves forward to be a member, apart from politicians who currently hold elected office.

They would then face an election. Out of all people who put themselves forward, the 100 people with the most votes would be selected to sit on the citizens' assembly.

The citizens' assembly would consider the contentious issue, consider the evidence on different perspectives and different arguments, and then decide on the best way forward.

The decision would be final. In other words, the government would accept in advance the decision of the citizens' assembly and agree to implement it.

The graphic below summarises the membership of the citizens' assembly:



GROUP [1D]:
Selection process: Citizens + politicians; election

Please read the following proposal.

In Northern Ireland, there are some issues on which politicians are divided over the way forward. On these issues, it has been proposed that a version of a citizens' assembly could decide on the way forward instead.

The citizens' assembly would consist of 50 ordinary members of the public and 50 elected politicians.

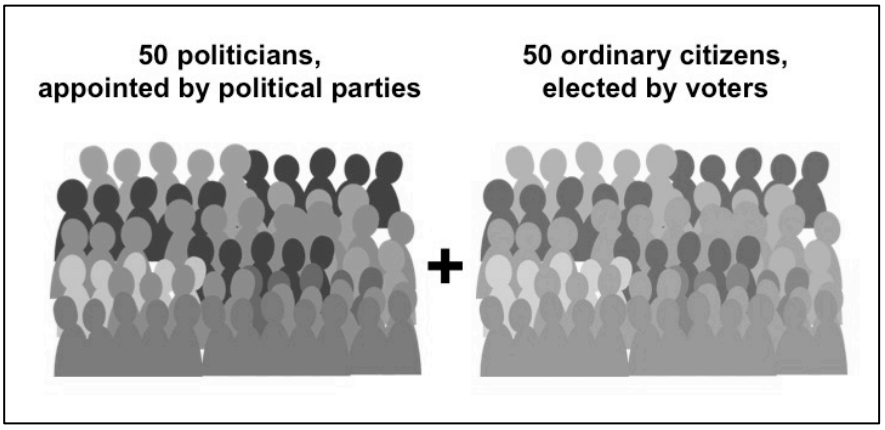
Any member of the public would be able to put themselves forward to be a member. They would face an election. Out of all members of the public who put themselves forward, the 50 people with the most votes would be selected to sit on the citizens' assembly.

The political parties would appoint the remaining 50 members – in proportion to their seats in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The citizens' assembly would consider the contentious issue, consider the evidence on different perspectives and different arguments, and then decide on the best way forward.

The decision would be final. In other words, the government would accept in advance the decision of the citizens' assembly and agree to implement it.

The graphic below summarises the membership of the citizens' assembly:



GROUP [2A]:
Decision-making: Information + taking a decision

Please read the following proposal.

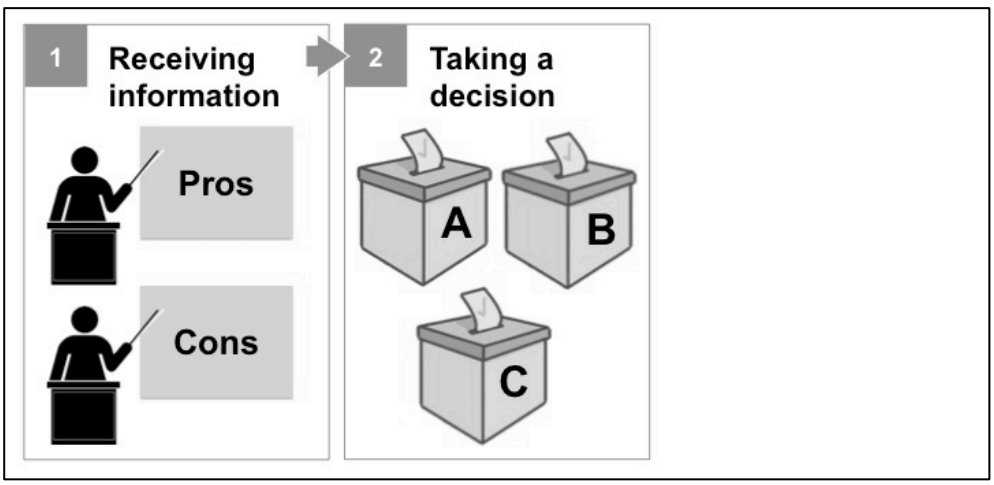
In Northern Ireland, there are some issues on which elected politicians are divided over the way forward. On these issues, it has been proposed that a citizens' assembly could decide on the way forward instead.

The citizens' assembly would consist of a group of ordinary citizens that is representative of the whole population of Northern Ireland. Members would be randomly chosen, in the same way that legal juries are selected.

The citizens' assembly would consider an issue in two phases:

1. *Receiving Information*
   Participants in the citizens' assembly will be assumed to have no prior knowledge of the issue in question. They will all be provided with background information and presented with arguments from both sides of the issue.
2. *Taking a Decision*
   After learning about the issue, members of the citizens' assembly would then be asked to vote on it. What a majority of these people decided in the vote would be seen as the decision on the issue and would be implemented.

The graphic below summarises the decision-making process of the citizens' assembly:



GROUP [2B]:
Decision-making: Information + group discussion + taking a decision

Please read the following proposal.

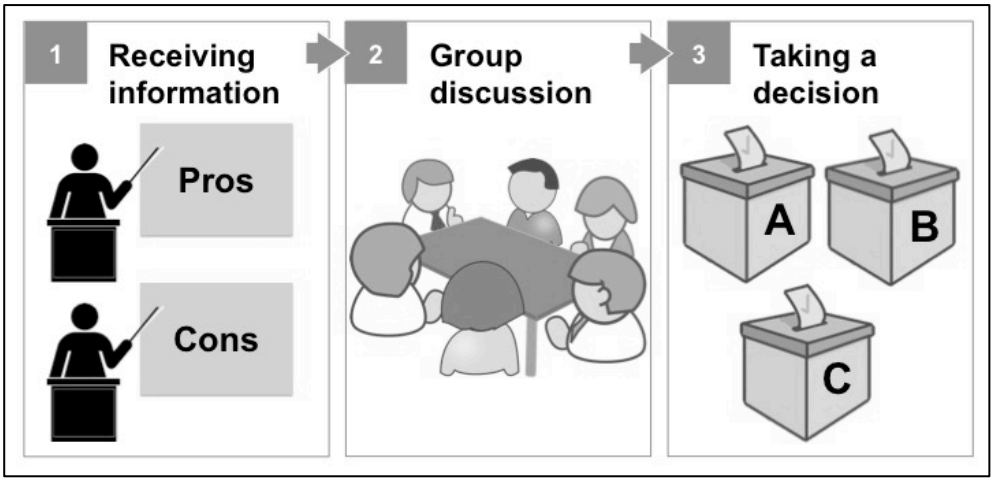
In Northern Ireland, there are some issues on which elected politicians are divided over the way forward. On these issues, it has been proposed that a citizens' assembly could decide on the way forward instead.

The citizens' assembly would consist of a group of ordinary citizens that is representative of the whole population of Northern Ireland. Members would be randomly chosen, in the same way that legal juries are selected.

The citizens' assembly would consider an issue in <u>three phases</u>:

1. *<u>Receiving Information</u>*
   Participants in the citizens' assembly will be assumed to have no prior knowledge of the issue in question. They will all be provided with background information and presented with arguments from both sides of the issue.
2. *<u>Group discussion</u>*
   Participants will then talk about the issue with each other, including with members from a different community. These discussions will take place in small groups of about ten participants, facilitated by a neutral chairperson. This will allow participants the opportunity to consider other perspectives as well as their own. They will be asked to try and think about common ground on the issue.
3. *<u>Taking a decision</u>*
   After learning about the issue, members of the citizens' assembly would then be asked to vote on it. What a majority of these people decided in the vote would be seen as the decision on the issue and would be implemented.

The graphic below summarises the decision-making process of the citizens' assembly:



GROUP [2C]:
Decision-making: Information + imagined conversation + taking a decision

Please read the following proposal.

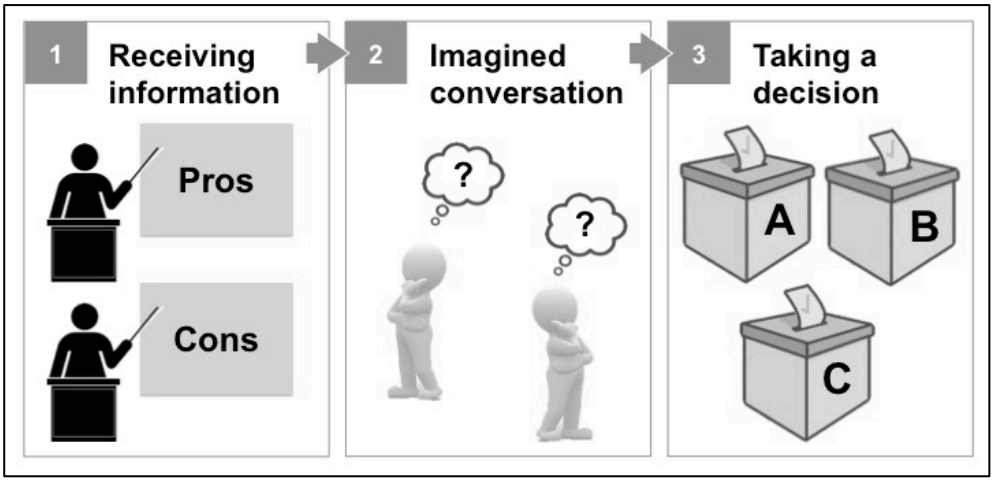
In Northern Ireland, there are some issues on which elected politicians are divided over the way forward. On these issues, it has been proposed that a citizens' assembly could decide on the way forward instead.

The citizens' assembly would consist of a group of ordinary citizens that is representative of the whole population of Northern Ireland. Members would be randomly chosen, in the same way that legal juries are selected.

The citizens' assembly would consider an issue in <u>three phases</u>:

4. *<u>Receiving Information</u>*
   Participants in the citizens' assembly will be assumed to have no prior knowledge of the issue in question. They will all be provided with background information and presented with arguments from both sides of the issue.
5. *<u>Imagined conversation</u>*
   Participants will then independently spend time thinking about the issue. They will be asked to imagine that they are having a conversation with a person from another community about the issue. This will allow participants the opportunity to consider other perspectives as well as their own. They will be asked to try and think about common ground on the issue.
6. *<u>Taking a decision</u>*
   After learning about the issue, members of the citizens' assembly would then be asked to vote on it. What a majority of these people decided in the vote would be seen as the decision on the issue and would be implemented.

The graphic below summarises the decision-making process of the citizens' assembly:



GROUP [3A]:
Decision-taking: Final decision by citizens' assembly

Please read the following proposal.

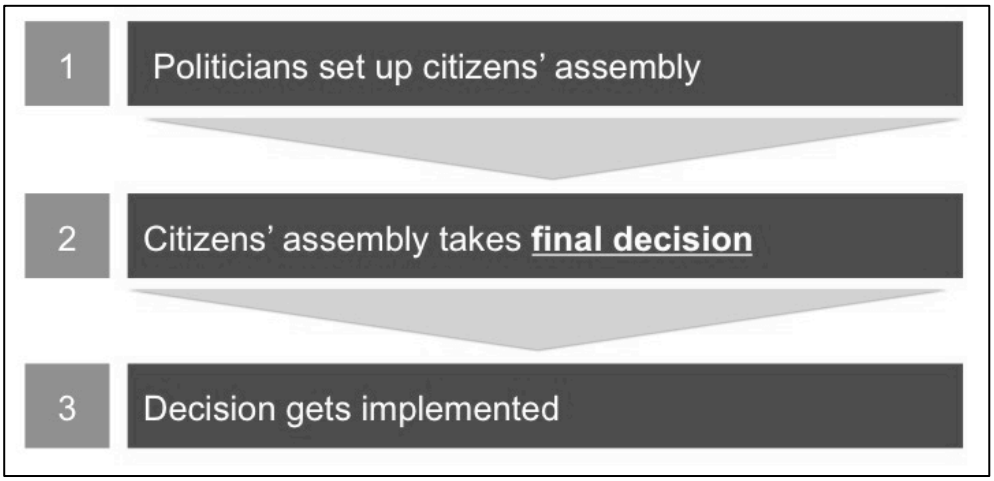
In Northern Ireland, there are some issues on which elected politicians are divided over the way forward, notably on Irish language legislation.

On the specific issue of an Irish language policy, it has been proposed that a citizens' assembly could decide on the way forward instead. The citizens' assembly would consist of a group of ordinary citizens that is representative of the whole population of Northern Ireland. Members would be randomly chosen, in the same way that legal juries are selected.

The citizens' assembly would consider the existing policy disagreement, consider the evidence on different perspectives and different arguments, and then reach a decision on Irish language policy.

The decision would be final. In other words, politicians would accept in advance the decision of the citizens' assembly and agree to implement it.

The graphic below summarises the decision-taking power of the citizens' assembly:



GROUP [3B]:
Decision-taking: Recommendation by citizens' assembly for politicians

Please read the following proposal.

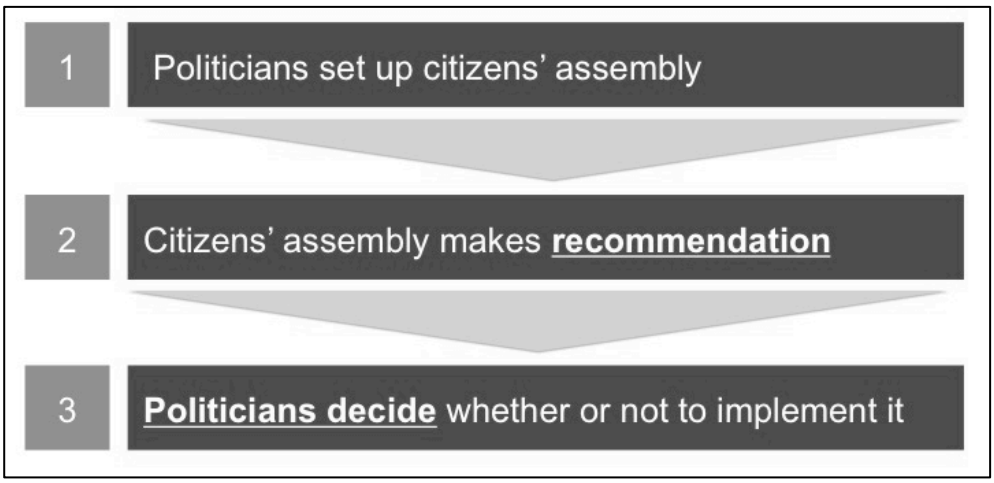
In Northern Ireland, there are some issues on which elected politicians are divided over the way forward, notably on Irish language legislation.

On the specific issue of an Irish language policy, it has been proposed that a citizens' assembly could decide on the way forward instead. The citizens' assembly would consist of a group of ordinary citizens that is representative of the whole population of Northern Ireland. Members would be randomly chosen, in the same way that legal juries are selected.

The citizens' assembly would consider the existing policy disagreement, consider the evidence on different perspectives and different arguments, and then reach a decision on Irish language policy.

The decision would be a recommendation that would be put to the Northern Ireland Assembly. In other words, politicians would have the final say on whether or not to implement the decision of the citizens' assembly.

The graphic below summarises the decision-taking power of the citizens' assembly:



GROUP [3C]:
Decision-taking: Recommendation by citizens' assembly for referendum

Please read the following proposal.

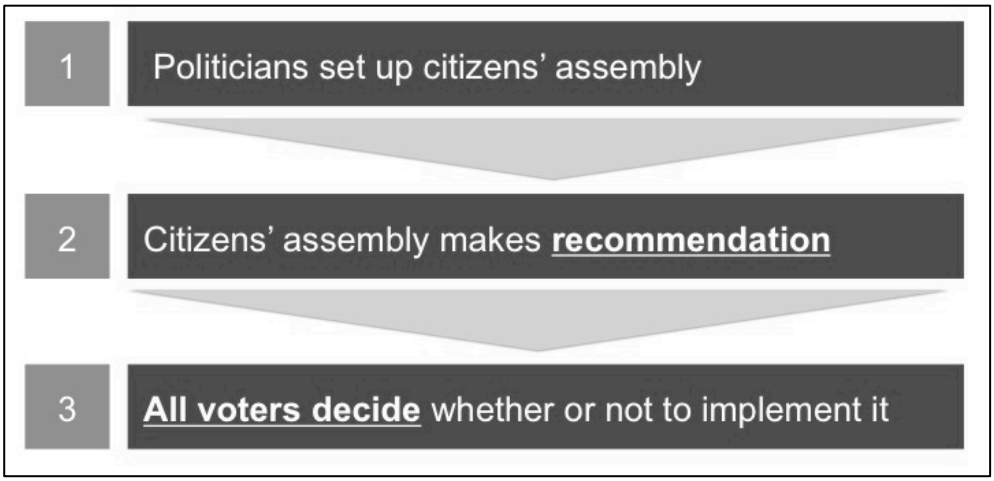
In Northern Ireland, there are some issues on which elected politicians are divided over the way forward, notably on Irish language legislation.

On the specific issue of Irish language policy, it has been proposed that a citizens' assembly could decide on the way forward instead. The citizens' assembly would consist of a group of ordinary citizens that is representative of the whole population of Northern Ireland. Members would be randomly chosen, in the same way that legal juries are selected.

The citizens' assembly would consider the existing policy disagreement, consider the evidence on different perspectives and different arguments, and then reach a decision on Irish language policy.

The decision would be a recommendation that would be put to all voters in a referendum. In other words, all citizens would have the final say on whether or not to implement the decision of the citizens' assembly. Politicians would agree in advance to implement this result.

The graphic below summarises the decision-taking power of the citizens' assembly:



PRESENTED TO ALL RESPONDENTS:

Imagine the way in which a citizens' assembly would deal with a political issue. As a way of making a decision, to what extent do you think this process would be…

CA1. … fair or unfair?

1	Extremely fair
2	Mostly fair
3	Slightly fair
4	Neither fair nor unfair
5	Slightly unfair
6	Mostly unfair
7	Extremely unfair

CA2. … trustworthy or untrustworthy?

1	Extremely trustworthy
2	Mostly trustworthy
3	Slightly trustworthy
4	Neither trustworthy nor untrustworthy
5	Slightly untrustworthy
6	Mostly untrustworthy
7	Extremely untrustworthy

CA3. … democratic or undemocratic?

1	Extremely democratic
2	Mostly democratic
3	Slightly democratic
4	Neither democratic nor undemocratic
5	Slightly undemocratic
6	Mostly undemocratic
7	Extremely undemocratic

CA4. … efficient or inefficient?

1	Extremely efficient

2	Mostly efficient
3	Slightly efficient
4	Neither efficient nor inefficient
5	Slightly inefficient
6	Mostly inefficient
7	Extremely inefficient

CA5. … even-handed or discriminatory?

1	Extremely even-handed
2	Mostly even-handed
3	Slightly even-handed
4	Neither even-handed nor discriminatory
5	Slightly discriminatory
6	Mostly discriminatory
7	Extremely discriminatory

CA6. … acceptable or unacceptable?

1	Extremely acceptable
2	Mostly acceptable
3	Slightly acceptable
4	Neither acceptable nor unacceptable
5	Slightly unacceptable
6	Mostly unacceptable
7	Extremely unacceptable

CA7. … good or bad?

1	Extremely good
2	Mostly good
3	Slightly good
4	Neither good nor bad
5	Slightly bad
6	Mostly bad
7	Extremely bad

CA8. … competent or incompetent?

1	Extremely competent
2	Mostly competent
3	Slightly competent
4	Neither competent nor incompetent
5	Slightly incompetent
6	Mostly incompetent
7	Extremely incompetent

CA9. … supportable or unsupportable?

1	Extremely supportable
2	Mostly supportable
3	Slightly supportable
4	Neither supportable nor unsupportable
5	Slightly unsupportable
6	Mostly unsupportable
7	Extremely unsupportable

CA10. … credible or not credible?

1	Extremely credible
2	Mostly credible
3	Slightly credible
4	Neither credible nor uncredible
5	Slightly uncredible
6	Mostly uncredible
7	Extremely uncredible

PRESENTED ONLY TO RESPONDENTS IN GROUPS 1A, 1B, 1C & 1D:

PE1. Think about how people are represented in Northern Ireland's political system. How important is it to you that representation promotes political equality for everyone?

1	Very important
2	Mostly important
3	Somewhat important
4	Not very important
5	Not at all important

PRESENTED ONLY TO RESPONDENTS IN GROUPS 2A, 2B & 2C:

DL1. Think about how decisions are made in Northern Ireland's political system. How important is it to you that decisions are made after extensive deliberation (that is, after the careful consideration of evidence and arguments on both sides of an issue)?

1	Very important
2	Mostly important
3	Somewhat important
4	Not very important
5	Not at all important

PRESENTED ONLY TO RESPONDENTS IN GROUPS 3A, 3B & 3C:

DE1. Think about how decisions are taken in Northern Ireland's political system. How important is it to you that decisions do not discriminate against a particular group?

1	Very important
2	Mostly important
3	Somewhat important
4	Not very important
5	Not at all important

PRESENTED TO ALL RESPONDENTS:

Now think about the Northern Ireland Assembly at Stormont when it is functioning.

When it comes to the way in which the Northern Ireland Assembly makes decisions, to what extent do you think its decision-making process is…

NIA1. … fair or unfair?

1	Extremely fair
2	Mostly fair
3	Slightly fair
4	Neither fair nor unfair
5	Slightly unfair
6	Mostly unfair
7	Extremely unfair

NIA2. … trustworthy or untrustworthy?

1	Extremely trustworthy
2	Mostly trustworthy
3	Slightly trustworthy
4	Neither trustworthy nor untrustworthy
5	Slightly untrustworthy
6	Mostly untrustworthy
7	Extremely untrustworthy

NIA3. … democratic or undemocratic?

1	Extremely democratic
2	Mostly democratic
3	Slightly democratic
4	Neither democratic nor undemocratic
5	Slightly undemocratic
6	Mostly undemocratic
7	Extremely undemocratic

NIA4. … efficient or inefficient?

1	Extremely efficient
2	Mostly efficient
3	Slightly efficient
4	Neither efficient nor inefficient
5	Slightly inefficient
6	Mostly inefficient
7	Extremely inefficient

NIA5. … even-handed or discriminatory?

1	Extremely even-handed
2	Mostly even-handed
3	Slightly even-handed
4	Neither even-handed nor discriminatory
5	Slightly discriminatory
6	Mostly discriminatory
7	Extremely discriminatory

NIA6. … acceptable or unacceptable?

1	Extremely acceptable
2	Mostly acceptable
3	Slightly acceptable
4	Neither acceptable nor unacceptable
5	Slightly unacceptable
6	Mostly unacceptable
7	Extremely unacceptable

NIA7. … good or bad?

1	Extremely good
2	Mostly good
3	Slightly good
4	Neither good nor bad
5	Slightly bad
6	Mostly bad
7	Extremely bad

NIA8. … competent or incompetent?

1	Extremely competent
2	Mostly competent
3	Slightly competent
4	Neither competent nor incompetent
5	Slightly incompetent
6	Mostly incompetent
7	Extremely incompetent

NIA9. … supportable or unsupportable?

1	Extremely supportable
2	Mostly supportable
3	Slightly supportable
4	Neither supportable nor unsupportable
5	Slightly unsupportable
6	Mostly unsupportable
7	Extremely unsupportable

NIA10. … credible or not credible?

1	Extremely credible
2	Mostly credible
3	Slightly credible
4	Neither credible nor uncredible
5	Slightly uncredible
6	Mostly uncredible
7	Extremely uncredible

PA1. If there were an election for the Northern Ireland Assembly tomorrow, which political party would you vote for?

1	Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)
2	Sinn Féin
3	Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)
4	Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP)
5	Alliance
6	Other (specify)
7	Would not vote
8	Don't know

PA2. In general, how much do you trust…?

		Trust a lot	-	-	-	Don't trust at all	Don't know
a	… **members of the public** in Northern Ireland?	1	2	3	4	5	8
b	… people from a **Protestant/unionist** community background?	1	2	3	4	5	8
c	… people from a **Catholic/nationalist** community background?	1	2	3	4	5	8
d	… **political parties** in Northern Ireland?	1	2	3	4	5	8
e	… the **British government**?	1	2	3	4	5	8

PA3. Would you say that you are…

1	… very strongly unionist?
2	… fairly strongly unionist?
3	… neither unionist nor nationalist?
4	… fairly strongly nationalist?
5	… very strongly nationalist?
8	Don't know

PA4. What is your community background? NB: It's your choice how you determine your community, i.e. whether it's what you are now, or how you were brought up (if different).

1	Catholic
2	Protestant
3	Other religion
4	No religion
5	Prefer not to say

PA5. Your constituency:

1	Belfast East	10	Mid Ulster
2	Belfast North	11	Newry & Armagh
3	Belfast South	12	North Antrim
4	Belfast West	13	North Down
5	East Antrim	14	South Antrim
6	East Londonderry	15	South Antrim
7	Fermanagh/S. Tyrone	16	Strangford
8	Foyle	17	Upper Bann
9	Lagan Valley	18	West Tyrone